

What 'Other People's Children' Had to Say: Culturally Diverse Students' Storied School Experiences

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**WHAT ‘OTHER PEOPLE’S CHILDREN’ HAD TO SAY:
CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS’ STORIED SCHOOL EXPERIENCES**

Dissertation by

KRISTA LUCAS

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ABSTRACT

The central focus of this dissertation is the schooling experiences of a small group of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The problem this study addresses is the relative absence of “student voice” in broader conversations about successful teacher preparation for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Conceptual and empirical literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, student voice and experience are reviewed as a means of situating the study. The theoretical framework incorporates sociocultural theories on teaching and learning, as well as sociological conceptions of childhood. Sixteen elementary school students attending public suburban, urban, and charter schools participated in this study. Primary data sources include transcripts from individual in-depth interviews and focus group conversations, and elicited student drawings. The qualitative research traditions of phenomenology and narrative analysis influenced data interpretation.

Findings are presented thematically, and four overarching themes were identified. Each of the four findings chapters speaks to the students’ experiences with learning, their peers, their teacher, and voice, both in the classroom and the research process itself. The perspectives shared by participants provide powerful glimpses into effective schooling for ‘other people’s children’ (Delpit, 1995).

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PREFACE

“A Neck Like a Chicken”

It is just after nine o'clock in the morning and I am seated, legs crossed, on burnt orange carpeting alongside twenty-three of my mother's first grade students. At the front of the room, a little boy leads the class in a calendar activity. All eyes are on the boy, except for the pair locked on me. A girl with brown hair and a faded pink t-shirt is looking intently at me. I glance at her, smile, and motion with a tilt of my head toward the calendar. I am attempting to communicate, without using words, that she ought to be paying attention to the activity going on in front of us, but clearly I am not very successful as this scene is repeated two or three more times until it occurs to me that this girl's persistent staring is an invitation to talk. I lean toward her. “What is it?” I ask quietly, thinking she must have a new puppy at home, today is her birthday, or that she's just lost a tooth, subjects of real importance to six-year-olds. Instead, she has news of an entirely different sort to relate to me. She hops up on her knees and begins to whisper excitedly in my ear.

“You have a big nose,” she gushes. “And your neck makes you look like a chicken.” I feel my cheeks growing warm as I look at her and nod. “Thank you,” I say, swallowing hard and pushing my hair away from my eyes. “I do have a big nose. It even has a bump on it.” I remove my glasses and point to the bridge of my nose. “Can you see it?” The little girl squints at my nose for a moment and then smiles. I wink at her. “You are very observant,” I tell her. “Do you think you can focus on calendar time now?” Apparently satisfied that her message has been properly conveyed and acknowledged, my

new friend shifts her position on the carpet so that she is now seated closer to me, her shoulder now brushing against my arm. “I *love* school,” I hear her sigh as she turns to face the calendar.

When I was confronted with the somewhat unnerving realization that the size of my nose was not unnoticeable to my mother’s first graders, I had a split second decision to make. I could have shushed the little girl whose keen powers of observation so unnerved me, but doing so would have been a mistake for several reasons. First, it would have been to deny the truth: my nose is, in fact, a bit large for my face. Second, my shushing her may have further distracted her, and other students, from the learning activity taking place. Finally and most importantly, my negative reaction might well have made the student feel rejected and disliked, rather than accepted and embraced by one of her teachers. As this classroom vignette demonstrates, when adults make time to listen to children, they have the opportunity to teach children a powerful lesson about their importance. Fostering an educational atmosphere that encourages, rather than silences, students’ voices, helps young children begin to appreciate that their ideas, thoughts and opinions matter.

CHAPTER ONE

Framing the Problem

Researcher's Context: A Second School Story

I look up at the clock and wince. If we can finish the last problem together, there will be three minutes of our lunch period left. My salad remains on the table, untouched. Not only am I hungry, I now realize I need to visit the restroom. I look over at Darnell. His face is scrunched up in concentration and he's wriggling in his chair. Evidently, he needs to go too. "Okay, Darnell," I sigh, turning my attention from my uneaten salad to the seven-year-old seated beside me. "Let's take a look at what you've worked on so far." Darnell pushes his math journal over so that I can look at it more closely.

"Did I do it right?" he asks hopefully. Although we have sacrificed many lunch recess periods in favor of one-on-one tutorial sessions over the past few weeks, as I look over his work it appears that our efforts have not paid off. Darnell's attempt to work independently on a problem has resulted in a repetition of the same mistakes I had hoped the extra help would eliminate. "Darnell, I know you worked hard, but this isn't right yet, you've made a mistake." I struggle to keep disappointment from coloring my voice. "Is there something I can do to make this less confusing for you? Would you like to work with the counting bears again?" I ask him, trying hard to prevent the frustration I feel at my failure from showing up on my face. Darnell looks at me and shakes his head. "Nah," he says. He looks back down at his journal page. Suddenly, he sits up straighter,

smiles broadly, and announces, “I got it Mrs. K! Let’s do this again when everybody comes in, only this time let’s go *slow*!”

I can’t believe what I am hearing. I feel I’ve paced my tutorial sessions with Darnell almost ploddingly, with so much repetition and focus on conceptual awareness that at that moment I simply can’t picture how to teach subtraction to ten any slower. But I trust Darnell’s advice. “Okay, Darnell,” I tell him. “Go outside, use the restroom, and we’ll work on this again after the bell rings,” I follow him out the door, and walk purposefully across the playground. My mind is whirling. I have less than three minutes to figure out how to help Darnell make the subtraction connections he needs, visit the restroom myself, and meet my class before the bell rings. I may doubt my abilities, but I don’t doubt that Darnell can master the concepts, given the right kind of support. *There is still time for him to learn this*, I remind myself, as I hurry toward the teachers’ lounge.

This story is based on an experience I had while working as a public school teacher in Los Angeles, California. As a white, middle-class woman teaching a classroom of linguistically and culturally diverse children, listening served as the key for meeting students’ needs. Although I thought my math lessons with Darnell were paced appropriately, he felt otherwise. Stepping back to ask Darnell what he needed helped me understand how *he* was experiencing my instruction, which in turn provided me with the input I needed to redesign our tutorial sessions. In time, Darnell, like his peers, learned how to subtract to ten, along with even more challenging concepts. Training myself to encourage, listen, and, most importantly, *respond* to the expert voices of my students

impacted my teaching dramatically, and these experiences inspired this dissertation study.

The Problem

In the conclusion of her book on listening as a teaching stance, Schultz (2003) recommends a new perspective on teaching and learning:

As we enter a new century in which classrooms are filled with students whose diverse backgrounds are often different in many ways from those of their teachers, we will need to envision fundamentally different ways of conceptualizing the teaching and learning transaction. Locating students at the center of teaching, using their stories to inform our decisions, is one place to begin. (p. 127)

Schultz advises positioning students at the center of teaching, and throughout this study, I've borrowed from her concept of listening as a teaching stance, locating students and their stories at the center of my research. The problem I address in this study is the relative absence of "student voice" in broader conversations about successful teacher preparation for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. In framing the importance of this study, I draw on literature related to the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy and to the body of work typically categorized as "student voice" research. In order to address the question of why student voice matters, it is necessary to first understand the challenge highlighted by Schultz (2003) and other prominent educational researchers: how to prepare teachers for success when they differ culturally,

ethnically, linguistically, and often economically, from their students.

In recent years, demographic changes have created areas in the U.S. in which “minorities” comprise the statistical population majority (Orfield & Lee, 2006). In both California and Texas less than forty percent of all enrolled students are categorized as white, not Hispanic. In Nevada, meanwhile, only a slim majority of fifty-one percent of students are categorized as white, not Hispanic (Orfield & Lee, 2006, p. 23). Although the US student population demographics have shifted, the nation’s teaching force has largely remained unchanged. While concerns over the demographic differences between students and teachers are not new (Clewell & Villegas, 1999; Sleeter, 2001b), statistics like these highlight the fact that demographic changes have not been met with changes in the teaching force. Overwhelmingly teachers in the United States are white, middle-class, monolingual and female (Marx, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2001a, 2001b; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

It has long been argued that reducing the cultural divides that separate many students and teachers would be a critical step toward improving the educational outcomes for all children. Researchers suggest that teachers of color are in a unique position to serve as role models and cultural brokers between their students’ home and school environments (Clewell & Villegas, 1999; Ukpolo, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Being able to draw on similar frames of reference in the classroom may assist these teachers in designing instruction for their students that capitalizes on shared, culturally significant, frames of reference (Ogbu, 1994). These frames of reference would not immediately be

available to a teacher whose culture differed from her or his students. Programs of teacher education have attempted to halt the widening cultural gap between their preservice candidates and future students in two primary ways: recruiting more preservice teachers of color, and “develop[ing] the attitudes and multicultural knowledge base of [their] predominantly White cohorts of preservice students” (Sleeter, 2001a, p. 96). Although sensible, such efforts seem to have had only mixed results. White, monolingual females continue to dominate the teaching force (Villegas & Clewell, 1998).

Creating a more diversified teaching force through increased recruitment and enrollment of students of color has proven to be a difficult task for programs of teacher education. Talented minority candidates are dissuaded from pursuing teaching careers due to a variety of factors. Inadequate educational experiences, tracking, testing requirements, and financial hardships, have been suggested as significant obstacles that may negatively impact students of color, preventing many candidates from enrolling in teacher education programs (Villegas & Clewell, 1998, p. 122). When predominantly white institutions manage to recruit preservice teachers of color to their programs, researchers suggest these students generally have negative experiences because students perceive their university’s are not welcoming or accepting of their viewpoints (W. R. Allen, 1992; Bennet, Cole, & Thompson, 2000). Nationally, it is estimated that ninety-two percent of full-time college faculty at four-year institutions are white, European-American (Moreno, Smith, Clayton-Pederson, Parker, & Teraguchi, 2006). Whiteness has long been argued to be pervasive in research and within programs of teacher

education (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Sleeter, 2001a, 2001b).

If few men and women from minority groups are choosing to become teachers, it makes sense for programs of teacher education to focus on what can be done to prepare their white students. However, preparing white preservice teachers for successful teaching in so-called “diverse” classrooms (those classrooms comprised of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds) is not easy. Negative or stereotypic attitudes held by some white preservice teachers about students of color, ELLs, or urban schools are tough to change. Researchers argue that influencing stereotypic teacher beliefs, through courses in multiculturalism, for example, is difficult, and efforts are often met with resistance or even resentment (Garmon, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Programs of teacher education have attempted to prepare their white candidates by requiring urban or multicultural field placements as a tool to help combat negative attitudes. However, immersing white preservice teachers in schools with large minority populations is no guarantee that negative attitudes or low expectations will change. In fact, studies show that such placements actually *reinforce* stereotypes held by some preservice teachers about urban or multicultural schools and the students they serve (Haberman & Post, 1992; Reed, 1993). Schultz (2003) argues that in order to meet the needs of students from a variety of backgrounds, listening, as a teaching stance, forms a bridge for teaching across differences. This practice helps teachers better understand how their students are experiencing instruction and positions students as knowledgeable. While the knowledge children possess about schools differs from adults’ knowledge,

student knowledge should not be presumed to be inferior. To do so equates difference with deficit, and deficit perspectives are particularly harmful to children (Dudley-Marling, 2007).

Guiding Questions

In this study, I interviewed culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students to gain nuanced understandings of how a particular group of young people have experienced school. Issues such as instruction and relationships with teachers and peers were of particular interest. The goal for this study was to solicit students' knowledge on their school experiences since "students possess *unique knowledge and perspectives* about their schools" (Mitra, 2004, pp. 652-653, emphasis added). Current understandings of the dispositions held and techniques used by successful teachers of these children have largely been built on the insights and expertise of outsiders—namely, adults. If the educational experiences of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children are to be improved, exploring these students' perspectives about their schooling experiences is an important place to begin.

The following questions served as a guide for this study:

- How do culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse children describe their school experiences? What stories do these children tell about school?
- What do these children's descriptions teach us about students' perspectives on school?

- In what way can focusing on these students' school experiences help the field of education improve the educational outcomes for all children, particularly those who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse?

Preservice candidates must be persuaded that soliciting and responding to students' perspectives on instruction is necessary for their students' success. "Constructivist, critical, multicultural, and antiracist pedagogies emphasize...that teachers can improve their practice by listening closely to what students have to say about their learning" (Cook-Sather, 2006b, p. 367). Teachers simply cannot expect to be successful in the classroom if they are not shown the value of listening to their students as a means of enhancing their professional development. As an exemplary teacher of Native Alaskan children put it, "in order to teach you, I must know you" (Delpit, 1995, p. 183). Listening to students should not be viewed of as an overly romanticized ideal, but "as a serious contribution to educational thinking and development" (Pollard, Thiessen, & Filer, 1997, p. 5). By focusing this study on student voice, I provide a platform from which children's perspectives can contribute to the existing knowledge base on preparing teachers for success in classrooms with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Perspectives

Sociocultural theories of teaching and learning serve as the primary theoretical influence for this study. Educators and researchers working from a sociocultural

perspective recognize that factors including students' backgrounds (including, for example, their culture, language, race, and SES), the contexts in which learning takes place, and the interactions among the social actors in a classroom setting—*matter* (M. McMahon, 1997). Sociocultural approaches suggest that, “in regard to human cognition the proper unit of study is not...the individual mind/brain, but people engaged in social forms of life out in the world” (Gee, 1992, p. 1). Thus, learning from the sociocultural point of view is not an exercise occurring in isolation in the mind of an individual; it is a “fundamentally cultural process” (Nasir, Rosenberry, Warren, & Lee, 2006, p. 489). Instruction from this perspective then, is not a matter of knowledge transmission from expert teacher to novice students. Instead, teaching and learning are viewed as interactive, social activities, mediated through language and experience, in which teachers and students learn from and with one another.

In order to understand how sociocultural perspectives meshed with the goals of this study, it is helpful to first contrast this approach from a cognitive constructivist point of view. The cognitive constructivist approach is primarily concerned with the “mental processes of the individuals, and the ways in which they construct knowledge *from within*” (Gergen, 1995, p. 28, emphasis added). The cognitive constructivist perspective is most closely associated with the work of Swiss psychologist, philosopher and biologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Piaget was interested in creating an epistemological theory that would describe the way children's thought processes change as they get older (Kellet & Ding, 2004). Central to Piaget's theories is his concept of schemas. Schemas are the mental road

maps through which individuals make sense of, and adapt to their environments (Grieg & Taylor, 1999). Schemas develop over time from basic reflexes to more complicated schemas. Piaget argued that our mental schemas develop through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of fitting a new experience, setting or object into an existing schema. Accommodation, on the other hand, requires the child to reconfigure an old schema to mesh with a new experience (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006).

Piaget argued that learning occurred as individuals adapted to their environments through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. From Piaget's perspective, acquiring knowledge was largely a hierarchical, bottom-up process, performed by individuals as they passed through four discrete developmental stages (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). A brief description of these stages, followed by a critique of Piaget's theories, follows.

In Piaget's model, all children go through the *sensorimotor* stage lasting from birth until about two years. Children at this stage experience the world primarily through reflexes as well as their five senses, developing gross and fine motor skills along the way. Hallmarks achieved by children at the end of this stage include participating in pretend play, and performing simple two step mental processes, such as putting one object down in order to drink from a cup (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 172).

The *preoperational* stage occurs between the ages of two and seven. Children's thinking at this stage is typically centered on their own needs and wants. Preoperational

children are argued to be better at concrete reasoning than abstract or logical reasoning. In a classic example of children's reasoning abilities at this stage, a child is shown two glasses of the same size, each holding the same amount of liquid. The child is asked whether the glasses have the same amount of liquid in them, then the contents of one of the glasses is poured into a taller and more narrow glass. The child is now asked if there is more or less liquid in the tall glass. Most children will assert that there is more liquid inside the taller glass (Grieg & Taylor, 1999). Children at this stage are also beginning to think symbolically. Examples of developing symbolic reasoning skills frequently show up in children's play, where a child may use a long wooden block to serve as a cell phone or remote control.

Piaget's third stage is called *concrete operations*, and takes place between the ages of seven and eleven. Children at this stage "begin to understand numbers, space and classification. They also begin to apply logical operations to concrete problems" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 172). The type of conservation tasks (liquid in glasses) that confused the preoperational child, are no longer a challenge. Although the concrete operational child demonstrates the ability to think in relative terms, and an increased ability to think logically, understandings are largely dependent on actual experiences. "What if" situations, or abstractions are much more difficult for children at this stage of cognitive development (Grieg & Taylor, 1999).

The fourth and final stage in Piaget's model is *formal operations*. Generally, children acquire formal operations between eleven and fifteen years of age. At this level,

children can reason abstractly. They are able to see situations from multiple perspectives, and engage in more complex mental activities such as deductive reasoning and hypothetical thinking (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Grieg & Taylor, 1999). This final stage signals a child's achievement of fully operational, normal or "adult" mental reasoning skills, a conceptualization that makes scholars working from outside the cognitive constructivist perspective uneasy, as the following quote illustrates:

What operative intelligence shows, then, is a competence achieved and deserved. That it provides analytically and culturally are some grounds to establish differences between adults and children. The control provided by adult competence justifies the supremacy of adulthood and further ensures that childhood, must, of necessity, be viewed as an inadequate precursor to the real state of human being, namely being 'grown up'. (James, et al., 1998, p. 18)

In contrast to Piagetian perspectives emphasizing the acquisition of "adult" reasoning skills, the sociocultural researcher considers participants as co-constructors of knowledge, regardless of the age or social status of those participants.

Another crucial distinction between sociocultural theories of learning, and cognitive constructivist perspectives is the role of language in learning. Piagetian theory is predicated on the belief that language does *not* facilitate cognitive development. Piaget argued that language merely reflected thought and that cognitive development occurred *before* language development. Piaget's ideas about the role of language and learning are rejected by sociocultural theorists (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Sociocultural theory posits

that the mind is mediated (Lantolf, 2000). In order for children to acquire higher order thinking skills, in other words, they must have access to human and symbolic mediators in the learning environment (Kouzin, 2003a). As children interact with other children and adults and use available, culturally significant, symbolic tools around them, (e.g. letters of the alphabet or arithmetic signs) they develop the skills and thought processes needed for more advanced intellectual work (Kouzin, 2003a).

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), a prominent Russian psychologist and contemporary of Piaget, is the chief contributor to sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's ideas about the ways in which human development occurs had, for many years, been influential in his home country and throughout Eastern Europe, before Vygotsky's ideas began to reshape educational and psychological thought in Western Europe, the United States and around the world (Kouzin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003b) .

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (hereafter, ZPD) is arguably his most well known and most misunderstood concept (Chaiklin, 2003; Kouzin, et al., 2003b). Vygotsky's use of the term encompassed three different understandings. In terms of human maturation, or in a developmental context, the ZPD refers to those psychological functions that have developed (Kouzin, et al., 2003b). In terms of testing situations, instruction, or in an applied context, the ZPD is the difference between what is possible for an individual to do with help from others, versus what that person might do entirely on their own (Kouzin, et al., 2003b; C. Lee, 2003). Finally, the ZPD can be considered metaphorically. This latter conceptualization is perhaps the most often misunderstood. Vygotsky's ZPD is

not a physical location, but rather “a metaphoric ‘space’ where everyday concepts of the child meet ‘scientific’ concepts provided by teachers of other mediators of learning” (Kouzlin, et al., 2003b, p. 3). In other words, the zone of proximal development is analogous to a type of observational device for understanding how students appropriate and internalize meditation tools for learning (Lantolf, 2000).

Applied to this study, sociocultural theories provided a rationale for seeking to elicit student voice through the research process. As Smith (2002) argues,

Advocacy for children’s best interests often relies heavily on knowledge obtained from social science about children’s problems and capabilities. Most of the data has been gathered through measures constructed by adults which allow children little choice about how they express their views, and which constrain them within a pre-defined framework....We should view children as articulate and competent enough to express the views in a way which respects their agency and participation rights, recognizes the central importance of cultural and social contexts, but does not regard children as the passive subjects of social processes. (pp. 73-74)

Inquiring into what children had to say about their schooling experiences reflected a broader view of instruction in which students and teachers work *cooperatively* as co-constructors of knowledge. Using these theories as interpretive lenses enabled me to explore how students, as social actors in the classroom, experienced various aspects of schooling, and by extension, what these students felt about their participation in a research study.

Sociology of Childhood

In addition to sociocultural theories, the “new” sociology of childhood is another significant theoretical influence for this study (Corsaro, 1997; James, et al., 1998).

Prevailing societal attitudes about childhood largely position children as “incompetent and incapable” in comparison to adults (Qvortrup, 1994, p. 2). Advocates of the sociology of childhood seek to counter these attitudes by promoting the idea that childhood is a social construction (Prout & James, 1997). From within this perspective, “childhood is the life-space which our culture *limits* it to be” (Qvortrup, 1994, p. 3, emphasis added). The view of childhood as a social construction stands in contrast to the dominant developmental conception of childhood traditionally held by psychology (Prout & James, 1997). From the developmentalist point of view, childhood is a period of life marked mainly by biological milestones. Socialization from the developmentalist perspective is paramount, with the purpose of childhood being likened to a complex form of apprenticeship to the norms and expectations of becoming an adult.

The sociology of childhood instead proposes that children are both shaped by society and actively participate in the shaping *of* society (Corsaro, 1997). Despite their age and marginalized status, children are capable of making profound and indelible changes on society, even as they are impacted by societal factors. Scholars have demonstrated, for example, that children take on a variety of complex roles and responsibilities in society, ranging from consumers, adoptees to foreign countries, voluntary and non-voluntary immigrants, entrepreneurs, political activists, and even as combat soldiers (Boocock &

Scott, 2005; Schor, 2004; Singer, 2006).

Some suggest that social science research has alternately ignored, marginalized, or regarded children as “exotic” (Corsaro, 1997; Jenks, 1996; Qvortrup, 1994). Given the number of studies published that include children as participants, the claim that social scientists have ignored children would seem insupportable. However, the issues of marginalization and rendering children as exotic in research are not easily dismissed. For some, marginalization of children is evidenced by the ways in which research decisions often silence children. Part of this silencing of children may result in part because of researchers’ adult ideological bias (Boocock & Scott, 2005; Grace, 1995). The adult ideological bias is the “tendency to obtain, analyze and interpret data about children from the perspective of nonchildren” (Boocock & Scott, 2005, p. 33). Since adults are all former children, in other words, they often assume they know what childhood is like based on their own childhood experiences (James, et al., 1998; Thorne, 1993). This leads to the frequent privileging of adult interpretations of events over the interpretations offered by children (Boocock & Scott, 2005).

James et al. (1998) outline four different viewpoints of children and childhoods: the socially constructed child, the tribal child, the social structural child, and the minority group child (p. 4). Although the four viewpoints underscore certain social constructs over others, the categories themselves are not discrete and inflexible (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Researchers often adopt more than one viewpoint of children in their work (e.g. Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Punch, 2003). Since these viewpoints influenced the research

approach taken in this study, I first describe each perspective, and then explain how these viewpoints impacted the design of this study.

A view of children that is *socially constructed* begins with the assumption that childhood cannot “exist in a finite and identifiable form” (James, et al., 1998, p. 27). Rather, childhood is viewed as diverse, changing, and culturally mediated. For example, in one family, a seven-year old might be given babysitting duties during a parent’s absence, and in another home, a child of the same age would receive supervision from another adult (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Differences in parenting can often be explained as simple differences in preference, but at other times these differences are rooted in cultural beliefs. In other words, “although children may be biologically immature this immaturity is understood differently, a meaning that is cultural” (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 9).

The *tribal child* perspective seeks to overturn the study of children as future beings. Advocates suggest that children and adults occupy separate worlds, and it is the worlds of children that researchers seek to illuminate and understand. The use of the term tribal is deliberate, bringing to mind early anthropological studies of “exotic” peoples in distant lands, and this is the most challenging aspect of research from this perspective: researchers may trivialize the very worlds they are attempting to describe. In giving voice to children, it is possible for researchers to go too far, and do little more than produce research reports in which “whimsical tales — quaint fables of the tribes of childhood and anecdotal accounting” are all that are achieved (James, et al., 1998, p. 29).

The next perspective is described by James et al., (1998) as the *minority group*

child. Children as a group are thought of as “lack[ing] power to influence the quality of their lives” (Mayall, Bendelow, Storey, & Veltman, 1996, p. 207). Researchers working within the minority group child perspective not only highlight the power differentials that complicate relationships between adults and children, but they work to confront these differentials.

The *social structural child* point of view focuses on the ways issues such as race, gender, social class, or disability interact with categories like culture, neighborhood, or economic outlook (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). The purpose of these studies is to bring the perspectives of youth into focus. Holmes (1995), for example, interviewed children in order to understand how racial awareness develops in young people. The social structural and minority group child foci are the two most applicable to the aims of this study, in terms of the desire to confront power differentials between adults and children, and the interaction between my participants’ cultural and linguistic diversity and their experiences in school.

Although several tenets of the sociology of childhood have influenced the design of this dissertation, there are two aspects of this scholarship that have been particularly useful. First, scholars in this field have made it clear that there is not a universal experience that can be labeled childhood. In its place are many diverse *childhoods* experienced differently by individuals (Jenks, 1996). In terms of this research, I am not attempting to suggest I uncovered the ways culturally diverse children experience school. This is impossible. Rather, I hoped to describe, in some detail, the divergent schooling experiences of a small

group of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children, highlighting similarities and differences without categorizing these experiences as universal.

A second perspective of children within the sociology of childhood that was influential to this study is the notion that children are social actors who shape and are shaped by their circumstances (James, et al., 1998). I recognized throughout this study that students affect and are affected by circumstances, situations, and relationships connected to their schooling experiences, and that the children who worked with me would affect, and be affected by, their participation in this research. This study serves as a vehicle for exploring some of the ways a small group of students have experienced school, and to a lesser extent, how these students experienced being the subject of research.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study elicited culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse students' perspectives since current understandings of the dispositions held and techniques used by successful teachers of these children, have been built upon the insights of *outsiders*—namely, adults. In his article outlining a reflective model for the study of African Americans, for instance, Milner (2006) asked, “what does it mean to experience and live in a world that does not find your views, preferences and experiences normal or acceptable?” (p. 370). In this dissertation, the views of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children were of interest because students' feelings of connectedness to an in school are sometimes impacted by factors like SES, race, and even style of dress. Fine's (1990)

research suggests that students of color, those from lower income families, and young women often feel as though they merit less comprehensive education on the basis of their gender, SES status, cultural background or ethnicity. Fine argues that society in effect teaches these students that exclusion from a better quality education is justified. Aronson (2002), meanwhile, explains that “near the bottom of the [school] social pyramid are those youngsters who are the ‘wrong’ race or the ‘wrong’ ethnic group; dress differently, are too short, too tall, too thin, too fat, too ‘nerdy,’ or just do not fit in easily” (p. 210). Edwards (1995) cautions that when students feel alienated in society, they are apt to feel equally alienated at school. These scholars’ assertions are concerning. Feelings of isolation, whether those feelings emerge from experiences in society at large or the school environment, can be detrimental and thwart students’ academic success. Researchers have found that students who feel isolated in their school community are at increased risk of failure in school (Beck & Malley, 1998).

Persistent disparities in the academic achievement between culturally and linguistically diverse students and their white peers, and overrepresentation in special education and classrooms for behaviorally disordered children, are symptomatic of what Ladson-Billings refers to as the education debt (2006). This debt will not be eliminated even if the so-called achievement gap is eradicated. If the educational experiences for our nation’s students are to be improved upon, understanding culturally diverse students’ perspectives about their schooling experiences is a important place to begin.

The organization of this dissertation centers on an exploration of the voices of these

students as illuminated through a thorough presentation of their experiences, stories, and perspectives on their schools and teachers. Chapter Two begins with a description of the ways feminist scholars and critical race theorists have understood “voice,” a central concept for this study. I also address the ways in which the voice as a concept is exemplified by culturally responsive pedagogy. I conclude the chapter with a review of the literature on student voice and experience.

In Chapter Three, I present the research design for this study, the research site, and introductions of the participants themselves. This study draws from qualitative research traditions, primarily phenomenology and narrative analysis. Data include focus group conversations, individual in-depth interviews, and invited student drawings.

Chapter Four is the first of four separate findings chapters. In this chapter I discuss my participants’ experiences with learning. Three subthemes provide detailed examples of the ways in which participants understood and experienced the learning process. I argue that participants’ views on learning were, at least partially, influenced by their experiences with accountability pressures in school, primarily how they experienced the annual State Test.

In Chapter Five, I address the students’ experiences with their peers. Participants’ perspectives on both positive and negative aspects of peer relationships are explored. Subthemes uncover the settings for friendships, students’ descriptions of instances of teasing and bullying, and both students’ and adults’ responses to negative peer relationships. Throughout this chapter, I suggest that while peer experiences were of great

importance to participants, social relationships are of much less concern to educators.

Chapter Six provides a glimpse into students' experiences with their teachers. Stories about teacher behaviors and actions that the children admired are presented first, followed by an examination of the accounts the children gave regarding disappointing interactions or experiences with teachers. In Chapter Seven, the final findings chapter, I address some of the ways in which my participants' stories reflect their experiences with voice, both in the classroom context and as a result of their participation in this study. Chapter Eight is the final chapter of this dissertation. In this chapter, I explicate the implications of this study. I focus on the potential for this study to inform classroom practice, teacher education and future research. I also address the limitations of this study.

Finally, it is important to note that the style of this dissertation is distinctive by design. I have deliberately included personal stories to frame this study as a preface to the work that follows, and as an epilogue to this research. These stories should not be considered data, nor do I include them as a form of self-flattery. Rather, these stories are intended to serve as a means of contextualizing and clarifying my point of view. These opening stories highlight events from my professional career that inspired the design and direction of this dissertation. Portions of Chapter Seven and the Epilogue, in particular, illuminate some of the complications I experienced in struggling to give free rein to student voice while fulfilling dueling roles as listener, interpreter, writer, researcher, and advocate.

C H A P T E R T W O

Troubling Voice: A Review of the Literature

Two concepts are central to this dissertation and each one will be addressed here in depth. The first concept is “voice.” This term, as the title of this chapter suggests, is troublesome. Voice has been understood in different ways, and while some scholars advocate for voice research, critiques of these research efforts also exist. In this chapter, I first provide an introduction to two specific bodies of work that have championed voice: feminist scholarship and critical race theory. Critiques of voice research are also presented here, along with a description of my response to those critiques as I designed this dissertation study.

The second key concept for this study is “culturally responsive pedagogy,” which I view as an expression of voice in the classroom context. Practitioners of culturally responsive pedagogy consider students’ backgrounds as available tools for helping them achieve success in the classroom. I will highlight the main tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy, demonstrating the links between this pedagogic stance and the concept of voice.

In the final two sections of this chapter, I provide an in-depth description of Fielding’s (2001) typology for assessing student engagement in “student voice” activities. I use Fielding’s typology as an organizational tool for the literature review presented in this chapter. I begin, however with an introduction into the ways the term “voice” is understood by other scholars.

Voice as a Feminist Construct

Since the concept of student voice is a central focus of this study, it is important to understand how scholars have understood the concept of “voice.” Although the term voice is used in everything from writing research to studies of identity formation, only the two most relevant bodies of scholarship are introduced here. Prominent feminist scholars and critical race theorists have used the term voice in ways that are distinct, yet complementary. In the section that follows, I present some of the ways the term voice has been understood by feminist scholars.

In Gilligan’s book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1993), she masterfully argued that just as there is a masculine mode of moral reasoning, which she termed an “ethic of justice,” there is also a feminine form (p. 73). This feminine form, which she termed an “ethic of care,” is in Gilligan’s view, a *different* voice, with distinct values and perspectives of its own (p. 73). Gilligan argued that when women were presented with hypothetical situations involving ethics decisions, they tended to respond in ways that differed from the typical responses of males. Women reacted to these kinds of scenarios on a “case-by-case basis, seeking imaginative solutions” (Delgado, 1991, p. 11). Generally speaking, the solutions female participants provided to these ethical dilemmas were not options anticipated by researchers. The novelty of the responses provided by women resulted in their being assigned to lower moral reasoning levels than males. Gilligan’s work demonstrated that women and girls were not any less moral than their male counterparts, but that the *instruments* used to measure moral reasoning were

useless in assessing women's moral voices (Tong, 1998).

It is important to note the fact that Gilligan never suggested assessing men's moral development, reasoning, and language on scales designed for measuring women's moral reasoning. This kind of reversal might have been expected (Delgado, 1991), but Gilligan had other ideas. Instead, she argued for measuring moral reasoning on an entirely new scale. Gilligan felt a new scale was warranted in order to "take into account the way gender affects the moral reasoning process" (Tong, 1998, p. 156). Gilligan championed for a new program of research in the field of adult development, one that was designed to illuminate "*...in women's own terms* the experience of their adult life" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 173, emphasis in the original).

Throughout this study I was similarly interested in learning about a critical aspect of children's life experiences, and described in children's own terms. My desire was to approach this study with the understanding that children's perspectives about school would be different from adult perspectives. Herein lies one of the primary challenges of "voice" research, as Gilligan eluded to in her conclusion: "As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women, but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 173). A parallel challenge exists when researchers attempt to listen to children's voices.

Promoting student voice as a source of knowledge is not an easy enterprise. As an adult seeking to learn from and elevate the voices of a select group of culturally diverse

students, I placed myself in the difficult position of attempting to gain the trust of persons over whom I exerted power, based on age alone (although there were certainly other confounding issues including race, ethnicity, and education level that further complicated participant-researcher relationships). As Fielding (2004) stated, “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of meaning making of their work together” (p. 309). Despite these contradictions and challenges, it is still necessary to push forward and increase student voice in order to enact a “repositioning of students” in schools (Cook-Sather, 2006b, p. 361), the field of educational research, and society at large.

Feminist scholars have argued, “*silent* women have little awareness of their intellectual capabilities. They live selfless and voiceless at the behest of those around them. External authorities know the truth and are all-powerful” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 134, emphasis in original). In much the same way that silenced women have difficulty seeing themselves as valued, intelligent, or respected in society, young people, especially those children who attend urban schools, where the silencing of students is routine (Fine, 1992). One of the goals of this study was to provide participants with an opportunity to contribute their knowledge and gain an appreciation that their experiences and knowledge about school were held in high esteem.

Voice in Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged out of the critical legal studies movement as a

related but distinct form of scholarship (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Legal scholars including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda and Kimberley Crenshaw are recognized as among the pivotal early architects of critical race theory. Critical race theory developed as a critique of critical legal studies, CRT scholars argued that critical legal studies ignored the reality of race in legal studies as well as in other fields (Bergerson, 2003; Nebeker, 1998).

In highlighting some of the central tenets of critical race theory, I borrow from a set supplied by Nebeker (1998). In general, critical race theory, attempts to:

- (a) name and discuss the pervasive, daily reality of racism in U.S. society that serves to privilege whites but disadvantage people of color;
- (b) expose and deconstruct seemingly ‘color-blind’ or ‘race-neutral’ policies and practices that entrench the disparate treatment of non-white persons;
- (c) legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order that purposefully devalues them; and
- (d) revisit civil rights law and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory sociopolitical relationships. (pp. 26-27)

As it applies to education, critical race theory is grounded in the understanding that just as racism is omnipresent in society, it is also prevalent in institutional structures, including schools (Delgado, 1990, 1991). Racism is argued to be so entwined in the institution of schools, in fact, that it has been observed that “those places where African Americans do experience success tend to be *outside* of the public schools” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55, emphasis added). The notion that racism in society and schools is a “permanent

fixture” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11, paraphrasing Bell, 1992) frees critical race theorists from the task of having to explain or justify the existence of it in their scholarship (Bergerson, 2003). Many educational issues are thus problematic for critical race theorists. Solarzano (1998) lists issues such as, “objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and neutrality, and equal opportunity,” (p. 122) as being suspect in CRT because school structures overwhelmingly tend to enact policies that benefit the status quo, and/or white students (Bergerson, 2003).

Critical race theorists believe storytelling and giving voice to the experiences of marginalized persons is beneficial (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). If, as CRT asserts, racism is a fixture in society it stands to reason that suppressing the voices of marginalized persons would be a conscious or unconscious goal of dominant groups. It is for this reason that critical race theorists advocate for the telling of “counter stories,” or first-person accounts “that deserve to be heard [because] they reveal things about the world that we *ought* to know” (Delgado, 1990, p. 95, emphasis in original). The purpose of these counter stories is three-fold. First, counter stories help to demonstrate that “much of reality is socially constructed”; second, the “stories provide members of outgroups [with] a vehicle for psychic self-preservation”; and third, “the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious conviction of viewing the world in one way” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). In CRT storytelling is a tool for giving voice to the unheard. To critical race theorists, voice is a tool to combat injustice, through communicating the real-life

experiences of oppressed persons (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

This dissertation study encouraged young students of color to share their stories about their experiences in school. As I initially thought about this study I hoped the opportunity to speak out in this way would be beneficial for participants. Throughout my research, I was mindful of that as a white, middle-class, monolingual woman working with children whose cultural, racial, economic and linguistic backgrounds differed from mine, I needed to tread carefully. Critical race theory reminded me that while my voice as the author of this study was central, I could work to ensure that my voice was not so omnipresent as to silence the very students whose stories I wanted to promote.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as an Expression of Voice

Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined in this study as an expression of voice. Many of the ideas that undergird this approach to instruction have links to critical theory, sociocultural perspectives, and multiculturalism (Santamaria, 2009). Beginning in the early 1970s, researchers urged educators to reexamine their perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, let go of deficit based perspectives, think seriously about their understandings of culture, and expand curriculum to include all students (e.g., Abrahams & Troike, 1972; Aragon, 1973; J. A. Banks, 1975; Gay, 1975). Crucial to the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy (hereafter, CRP) is the notion that students' cultural and linguistic heritage be embedded in curriculum and instruction they experience (Gay, 2000). Rather than viewing students' backgrounds as obstacles to be overcome,

culturally responsive pedagogy begins with the premise that language and culture are resources for academic success.

Teachers who practice CRP understand that adopting a culturally responsive stance improves student outcomes by first enhancing their instruction (J. E. King, 1994).

Practitioners infuse cultural referents as tools for guiding student learning. “These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). Instead of expecting students to simply adapt to school norms, CRP fosters a climate in which unfamiliar content, modes of communication, and expectations are conveyed in students’ frames of reference (Gay, 1975). Culturally responsive pedagogy is therefore decidedly student-centered, and teachers who practice it routinely supplement (or supplant) existing school curricula with materials and lessons that reflect students’ cultural and linguistic frames of reference, while simultaneously supporting students’ learning styles and strengths (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Researchers have documented that culturally responsive pedagogy can improve student achievement (Gay, 2000; Sheets, 1995). However, it needs to be understood that, “being a culturally responsive teacher is not simply a matter of applying instructional techniques nor is it primarily a matter of tailoring instruction to incorporate [the] assumed traits of customs of particular cultural groups” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 27). This point is one frequently misunderstood by many teachers and administrators who confuse CRP as merely “good teaching,” while ignoring the critical, social, political and academic intents of

the theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It is easy to presume good teachers would be successful no matter what students groups they worked with, but this is not the case. Many “good” teachers, knowingly or unknowingly, adopt a colorblind pedagogy. Colorblind pedagogy conflates equity with equality, and it “fails to encourage change in either teachers’ practice or the outcomes for students of color. Such a view and set of practices can be viewed as restrictive” (C. Ryan & Dixson, 2006, p. 180). Thus, teachers may develop warm relationships with students and their families and they may help students improve academically, but colorblind practice ultimately excludes children (Santamaria, 2009).

Scholars assert that culturally responsive pedagogy: (a) is rooted in the belief that all children can learn (Ladson-Billings, 1994); (b) circumvents patterns of “learned helplessness” whereby children do *worse* academically the longer they are in school (Holliday, 1985); (c) encourages children to maintain their familial traditions and values even as they acquire the values of the culture of power (Delpit, 1995); and, (d) empowers, transforms, and emancipates students “from the constraining manacles of mainstream cannons of knowledge and ways of knowing” (Gay, 2000, p. 35). Teachers who adopt CRP ensure their students achieve academic success, and they help them become co-constructors of knowledge so that students develop the skills needed to question status quo assumptions. In culturally responsive pedagogy,

teachers and researchers must work to continually make sense of youth’s varied ideas, ways with words, and experiences...coming to grips with the *limiting*

power of one's own knowledge, perspectives and values with regard to academic discourses, learning and teaching, language, culture and race. (Nasir, et al., 2006, p. 496, emphasis added)

As demographic changes create more schools with where “minority” populations are statistical majority populations (Orfield & Lee, 2006), it is imperative for the nation’s teaching force to acquire the critical consciousness required for teachers whose orientation to teaching and learning can be called culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to instruction and relating to students that is academically rigorous, respectful, and supportive. From the outset of this study, I anticipated the students I interviewed would comment on aspects of their teachers’ practice and the larger school environment that dovetailed with scholarly descriptions and accounts of CRP. Conversely, I also believed it was likely that students would offer ideas that had little or no connection to elements of culturally responsive pedagogy described by researchers. Asking participants to comment on teaching practices, adult-student relationships and school climates they experienced was not done as an attempt to “validate” culturally responsive pedagogy. Instead, I expected there would be areas of overlap and departure between what participants expressed, and the techniques, approaches, and dispositions identified by scholars as exemplars of CRP. These areas of overlap and departure were a source of interest, but the primary focus of this study was to learn more about participants’ perspectives on their schooling experiences.

Critiques of Voice Research

In order to properly situate this study within existing research, it is necessary to point out that there are critiques of voice research originating from researchers within and outside the field. Ignoring critiques of voice research is unprincipled; there is much to be learned from the scholarship that is critical of the voice research genre. As some have pointed out, one of the unfortunate assumptions about voice research is that it is so routinely presumed to be an liberating for participants (Orner, 1992), an idea Komulainen (2007) suggests ought to be carefully examined:

The question arises whether ‘listening to children’ in social research is an empowering or a rhetorical device. Is it simply one that attempts to furnish young children with a western value of competence, while at the same time, paradoxically, purporting to undermine hegemonic notions of a ‘skill’? (p. 25)

As Komulainen puts forward, the act of listening to students should not automatically be considered either a straightforward or an inherently good endeavor. In reality, when researchers attempt to access student voice through listening their presence can be perceived as intrusive, coercive, or even as a means to surveil young people (Morrow & Richards, 1996; D. Roberts, 2000; Schultz, 2003).

Scholars have also suggested that the term voice is problematic. First, use of the term “voice” in calls for student voice seems to suggest that students have a single static voice (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Such a view denies that students’ voices and identities are undoubtedly affected by the contexts in which they are speaking, power differentials

(Orner, 1992). Research demonstrates, for example, that beliefs about the value of voice are culturally specific. Generally speaking, calls for increasing student voice reflect a Western view of independence; a viewpoint that differs significantly from East Asian perspectives on the subject, for example (Kim & Markus, 2002; Kim & Sherman, 2007). Second, as voice has been used in discussions of teaching writing, the differences between the author and text are made synonymous with the student writer, and the writing itself is cast as a kind of “transparent medium through which the ‘person behind the text’ can be seen” (Gilbert, 1989, p. 22). The propensity for writer and text to be conflated leads Kamler (2003) to suggest that voice is the wrong word to use in pursuit for important goals such as improving student engagement, understanding and communicating in teaching writing.

Cook-Sather (2006b) cites concerns about the term voice presented by Kamler and others, in her discussion of how the term is applied to the research context, she notes a critical difference:

Although...warnings against particular understandings and uses of voice are valid—warnings about constructing voice as equal to an individual, as single and uncomplicated, as given rather than constructed in relationship—because student voice in educational research and reform is still about bodily presence and participation...it is worth considering retaining as well as critiquing the term. (p. 365)

In other words, while the term voice may be less than ideal, use of the term, for better or worse, persists. Robinson and Taylor (2007) assert that the term serves as a kind of

“strategic shorthand” among researchers who recognize the limitations of the word but continue to use it “for historical and pragmatic reasons” (p. 6). It may be that “voice” is a troubling term, but it is used throughout this dissertation because it is the term used in the literature within which this study fits, and best articulates the goals of this research effort.

Situating the Current Study: A Typology for Student Voice

In order to explain the nature of research activities categorized as student voice, understanding Fielding’s (2001) four-part typology for student engagement is quite useful. Table 1 (below) is a chart summarizing critical components of Fielding’s typology.

As is evident in the chart, with each successive level of Fielding’s (2001) typology, there is a greater sense of equalization in the roles taken by young people and adults, and students’ levels of engagement also increase. The four levels of the typology include the following descriptors for student involvement: Level One: “Students as Data Source”, Level Two: “Students as Discussants”, Level Three: “Students as Co-Researchers”, and Level Four: “Students as Researchers” (p. 132). According to Fielding, research at the apex of this typology, “valorizes and extends a transformative notion of education at the heart of which lies the commitment to teaching and learning as a genuinely shared responsibility” (p. 137). Thus, it would seem that the ultimate goal of any student voice research is for students themselves to act as researchers. However, this does not mean that research at lower levels is not beneficial to young people.

Table 1: Typology for Student Engagement

<u>Engagement Level:</u>	<u>Student Role:</u>	<u>Teacher Role:</u>	<u>Teacher Engagement with Students:</u>	<u>School Example:</u>
Level 4:	Students are positioned as researchers. Student role is transforming.	Teachers listen in order to contribute and support student research.	Teachers participate in student led dialogues.	Students lead an evaluation of a high school's health education programs and later report their findings.
Level 3:	Students are positioned as co-researchers. Student role is collaborating.	Teachers listen in order to learn.	Teachers participate in teacher-led dialogues with students.	Teachers and students co-investigate the transition between elementary and middle school.
Level 2:	Students are positioned as active respondents. Student role is contributing.	Teachers hear what students say.	Teachers participate in discussions with students.	Teachers invite students to evaluate a unit of work, or participate in student councils or committees.
Level 1:	Students are positioned as sources of data. Student role is largely passive, but students may also receive a better informed pedagogy.	Teachers acknowledge and use performance information about students.	Teachers understand more about students through dissemination of data about student performance or attitudes.	Teachers learn from test scores, student attitude surveys and similar pieces of information.

Pursuing the highest levels of Fielding's (2001) typology is not always possible, nor is it always warranted. Fielding states that, "different levels and modes will be

appropriate at different times and in different contexts” (p. 137). Fielding’s typology therefore underscores the idea that student involvement even at the lowest levels can benefit students. I now provide a brief explanation of how the four levels differ and explain how the current study fits within Fielding’s typology.

When scholars incorporate student voice in their research efforts at level one, students are positioned as “data source.” Although Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) warn about the potential for marginalized communities to be treated as little more than “data plantations,” Fielding’s (2001) typology suggests research at level one *can* benefit participants. As student voice is elicited at this level, adults acknowledge and use information related to students’ performance, like test scores or student work samples. In the process of being acknowledged this way by the adults in the school, the students receive “a better informed pedagogy” (Fielding, 2004, p. 201) and enhanced school climate. The knowledge used at this level of the typology is related to students’ performance and their attitudes about learning.

In the second level, students participate as “active respondents.” In this role, students get to take part in dialogues with their teachers about learning and instruction. Teachers at this level, hear what students say, and “move beyond the accumulation of passive data” (Fielding, 2004, p. 201). Teachers therefore engage in discussions with their students to make sense out of existing data. At this level students might comment on teachers’ “shared lesson objectives” or help develop “explicit assessment criteria” (p. 132). A typical school example of student involvement at this level of the typology would be a

traditional student council, in which students are invited to engage in discussions with adults about a variety of different topics. At this level, the knowledge used is related to discovering how students learn.

At level three, students work collaboratively with adults as co-researchers. Although power differentials are not completely equalized at this level, “they are moving more strongly in an egalitarian direction” (Fielding, 2004, p. 202). Teachers at level three are listening to their students in order to learn from them, similar in many respects to the teaching stance advocated by Schultz (2003) mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation. At this level, teacher-led dialogues are enacted in which students’ ideas and opinions are solicited. Students are not determining which topics or questions should be investigated, but students are given greater opportunities to serve as partners with adults than in levels one and two. As might be expected, the knowledge used at this level is related to how “students might be able to contribute to deepen understanding” (Fielding, 2001, p. 132).

Student engagement at the top of Fielding’s typology provides for involvement at the very highest levels. At this level, the students themselves are in charge, and drive virtually all aspects of the research process. In these studies, students determine which research questions to investigate, what forms of data to collect and analyze and they also determine how the findings of their investigations should be presented. At level four, the adult’s role is to “listen in order to contribute,” (Fielding, 2004, p. 202) to students’ collective or individual research projects. The knowledge used at this level relates to

“what teachers and peers might be able to contribute to deepen understanding” (Fielding, 2001, p. 136).

This study provided student engagement at the second level of Fielding’s typology. Participants served as “discussants” as they were encouraged to talk about their schooling experiences during individual and focus group conversations. In both types of interviews, participants were invited to ask questions. This invitation gave participants opportunities to take on the role of “initiator” in the research process, and on occasion, participants did choose to ask me questions. Detailed descriptions of the interview processes and findings from those interviews appear in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. In the remaining sections of this chapter I summarize the literature on student voice, using Fielding’s typology as an organizational tool.

Student Voice and Experience Literature

I began the literature review process by conducting key word searches using Google Scholar, the ERIC database and other resources. Search terms included the phrases, “student voice,” “student experiences,” “student perspectives,” and “students as researchers.” In addition to electronic searches, following the reference trails of specific books, articles, and reviews helped me in the process of determining what research was most relevant to this dissertation study. In some cases, an article title included the phrase “student voice,” but the focus of the article was on techniques and methods in vocal music training, for example. Such studies are not presented here.

I deliberately privileged literature published since 1989 in this review. The year 1989 serves as a watershed moment in student voice research in many ways. First and foremost, after more than six decades of advocacy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC) was adopted in 1989 (Child Rights Information Network, hereafter CRIN, 2011). The CRC is premised on the idea that children, defined in Article 1 as people under the age of 18, are born with the rights inherent to all human beings. (CRC, 1989). Governments that have ratified the convention (currently all except for the United States and Somalia) share findings on children's rights in their countries (CRIN, 2011). The CRC (1989) is frequently cited in student voice literature, because Article 12 of the convention states,

1. [Governments] *shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (p. 4, italics added)

I base the bulk of my review around pieces published after the CRC was adopted because for two reasons. First, the adoption of the CRC reflects, to some degree a shift in societal attitudes. Prior to the adoption of the CRR, it can be argued, societies were unable (or

unwilling) to formally acknowledge children as having rights as human beings.

Additionally, the provision quoted above that governments should give children a chance to express their views and give those views due weight according to children's age and maturity is analogous to the efforts of researchers who seek to accomplish the same goals using different methods.

The 1989 adoption of the UN convention on children's rights has influenced student voice research, and this influence can be seen in the increased publication of studies as well as special journal issues and edited books devoted to student voice research. According to Thiessen (2007), it is only after 1990 that these kinds of pieces began appearing. This is significant, because as Thiessen argues,

One marker of the importance of a field of study is the emergence of published volumes that either include reviews of research conducted on one or more themes in the field or that bring together—in special issues of journals or in edited books, papers, or chapters—scholars who have recently completed inquiries in the various themes of the area. (p. 10)

Given the fact that the first journal issue devoted to student voice (volume 34, issue 2 of *Theory Into Practice*) was published in 1995, it is clear that student voice research is both relatively recent and evolving as a field of study (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009; Thiessen, 2007).

A few studies, published prior to 1989, are also worth mentioning. These studies include those presented in Silberman's (1971) edited book, *The Experience of Schooling*,

Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*, an outstanding account of working class boys in the UK, Paley's (1979) influential *White Teacher*, a discussion of her experiences as a teacher of culturally and linguistically diverse kindergarteners, and Shirley Brice Heath's (1985) *Ways with Words*, a landmark ethnographic study of two communities and the ways children in those communities learned to use language. These early studies were not deliberate attempts to elevate student voice, but they can be viewed as early precursors to student voice because of the researchers' focus on students' school experiences.

Students as Data Sources and Active Respondents

Changes in the way we view children's place in school and in society at large have been reflected in an increase of interest in research dealing with students' voice and experience in schools (Fielding, 2001, 2004; Manefield, Collins, Moore, Mahar, & Warne, 2007). Research falling under the category of student voice is diverse and students' level of involvement exists along a continuum (Cook-Sather, 2006b). Giroux (1988a) argues that studying students' perspectives on schools is "an important starting point for enabling those who have been silenced or marginalized by the schools...to reclaim the authorship of their lives" (p. 63). The studies presented in this section provided students with the opportunity to share their perspectives as data sources and discussants.

Considered a seminal piece of research by many scholars, Jackson's (1968) *Life in Classrooms* paved the way for countless studies of what school is like for children. Jackson spent two years as a participant-observer in four elementary school classrooms. He argued

that students experience school in terms of doing most things with peers, being evaluated by others, and learning how power differs between students and adults. He also highlighted the role of the “hidden curriculum” which encompasses the school rules and routines that aren’t taught explicitly, but all students are expected to learn anyway.

Jackson later collaborated two other researchers on another longitudinal study entitled *The Moral Life of Schools* (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993). In this study, the researchers’ focus was on learning how moral lessons were directly and indirectly taught in the classroom. The researchers conducted extensive observations in nearly twenty classrooms at the elementary and high school level. Research sites consisted of public, independent, and parochial schools. In the conclusion of their book, the researchers argued, “our central purpose...has been to encourage all who care about education to become more attuned to the moral significance of schools” (p. 295). Jackson et al.’s call for educators to pay attention to the “moral significance” of schools is in many ways analogous to other researchers’ calls for increasing student voice. In both instances scholars suggest that there is an ethical aspect to their research foci.

One of the most common subjects on which student voice is sought relates to larger school reform efforts, particularly students’ opinions about their teachers and schools (Thiessen, 2007). One of the broadest and most comprehensive studies of this type was conducted by researchers Wilson and Corbett (2001, 2007). Beginning with a group of nearly 250 sixth graders, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to get a student-centered impression of the impact of various district-sponsored school reform

initiatives. The participants attended one of five different low-performing schools in Philadelphia. Over a period of three years, participants commented on the quality of instruction they received, school curricula, and educational climates they encountered in teachers' classrooms.

The majority of the low-income students Wilson and Corbett interviewed concentrated more on objective factors such as their teachers use of particular instructional methods and techniques than on subjective matters related to their teachers' personalities. At the same time, however, the students communicated their desire for teachers who pushed students to excel, explained things in ways students could understand, maintained order, were available for help, and varied in-class assignments and activities (B. Wilson & Corbett, 2007, pp. 289-292).

Wilson and Corbett's positioning of young people as valuable allies in school reform mirrors work published by other scholars (e.g. Kushman, 1997; Noguera, 2007; B. Rubin & Silva, 2003; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996; Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). Noguera (2007), for example, studied how students in one city's high schools were involved in reform efforts. In the study, Noguera demonstrated how Boston area high schools successfully incorporated students' perspectives on school improvement initiatives at the school level. More than 130 students from ten high schools were interviewed and surveyed in the study. The students offered what Noguera categorized as "practical and common sense" (p. 206) suggestions. Analysis revealed that participants had concrete ideas about why some school programs succeeded and others failed. The students described the

influence of four key issues: adult-student relationships, mandated, high-stakes testing, school safety and discipline, and students' personal motivation and future goals.

In the case of school safety, Noguera's work brings out an important fact understood by many student voice researchers: certain aspects of schooling are in many ways "off-limits" to adults. In this instance, participants had understandings of the factors that precipitated conflicts and altercations taking place at school among students, which differed significantly from adults' perspectives of the same situations. Since the students were in a position to better understand the motivations that lay behind the conflicts, they were also better able to advise school officials on how they could begin to more effectively reduce the likelihood of similar incidents happening in the future.

Students' perspectives have also been of interest to researchers studying what Thiessen (2007) refers to as "taken-for-granted features of classrooms" (p. 20). These "micro" studies (p. 20) typically provide detailed analyses of a single issue or subject. In the field of literacy, topics of study have included students' perspectives on specific literacy practices (Evans, 2002; Guitierrez-Gomez, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Roldan, 2003), conceptions and definitions of reading (Bondy, 1990; Borko & Eisenhart, 1986) and even experiences with the transition from literacy classes in high school to those in college (Harklau, 2001). Researchers have studied students' views on the curriculum and instruction for specific school subjects including math, technology, and social studies (Lampert, 2001; Lubienski, 2000; Spires, Lee, & Turner, 2008; Stodolsky, Salk, & Glaessner, 1991) as well as in science (Ballenger, 2007; Ebenezer & Zoller, 1993; Osborne

& Collins, 2000; Prain & Hand, 1999; Speering & Rennie, 1996).

Ballenger (2007), for example, conducted a focused inquiry into two fourth grade bilingual boys' content area vocabulary use over the course of a science unit on motion. Data included transcripts from videotaped discussions, classroom conversations and one-on-one interviews with the two boys. In her analysis Ballenger highlighted examples of when the two boys' responses were misunderstood. When the classroom teacher asked for a kind of movement, one of the boys responded, "playing," which differed from the answers the rest of the class provided. In analyzing the exchange, Ballenger argued, "I believe at the time we thought he was unable to understand the category of movement as it was being used. Further reflection however, revealed that everything he proposed certainly involved movement" (2007, p. 106). Ballenger's work highlights the value of research done with, rather than *on* children.

Scholars have also studied students' attitudes toward, and experiences with topics including inclusion practices (Loreman, McGhee-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, 2009; Parvi & Monda-Amaya, 2001), students with disabilities (Lewis, 1995), race and gender (Connolly, 1998; Gallas, 1997; Thorne, 1993), and classroom management (J. Allen, 1986; Carter & Osler, 2000; Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2003; Lewis, 2002). While the above studies are in many ways, exemplars, one of the difficulties with micro accounts is that while the findings provide detailed snapshots of small aspects of the school day, these findings can sometimes obscure the bigger picture of students' overall schooling experience.

Some scholars have focused not on specific school or curricular issues, but on students who share common attributes such as age level, race, language, or various labels assigned by researchers, school personnel, and even society. Researchers have studied student groups identified as “stigmatized” and “successful,” and many other descriptors. Here I shift to review some exemplar studies within this tradition.

According to Lord’s (2005) review, research with secondary students is more common than research with primary grade students. Researchers have studied various aspects of the in-school experiences of teenagers. Researchers have sought adolescents’ perspectives on a range of school issues, such as students’ experiences in specific courses such as history (Epstein, 1998, 2000), math (Lubienski, 2000) and language arts (Harklau, 2001), and the impact of friends on teens’ adjustment to school, motivation, and achievement (Berndt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999; Berndt & Keefe, 1995; A. M. Ryan, 2001).

Shedding light on the experiences of students in a “non-traditional” secondary school, Nagle (2001) interviewed 20 students attending a vocational high school. The goal of the study was to learn how a small group of working class students experienced school. The findings suggested that the students found fitting in difficult. The students were found to experience barriers to accessing school literacy. Nagle argued that feelings of failure led many to isolate themselves from their peers, and that the students occupied space in the margins of school academically and socially.

Other scholars have focused on adolescents’ abilities to adjust to multiple social contexts, including school. For example, Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1998), studied

teenagers' adjustment and transitions among three social spheres. The researchers used a case study approach with more than fifty students from four urban high schools in order to learn how their participants handled adapting to and transitioning between family, peer and school contexts.

The experiences of teenagers labeled as either "at risk," or "successful" has also been of interest to researchers. Many scholars have focused on students who are considering dropping out of school (Dei, Mazzuxa, McIssac, & Zine, 1997; Fine, 1986; Kelly, 1993). Scholars have studied the experiences of "successful" adolescents (Hemmings, 1996; S. Lee, 1994; Nieto, 1994). Pope's (2001) study serves as an unusual example of this latter research focus. Pope studied how a small group of "successful" high school juniors and seniors became successful and were able to maintain that success. He discovered participants had learned to work the system in order to demonstrate success in school. Findings described specific actions including cheating, multitasking, aggressiveness and forming alliances and treaties as examples of behaviors the students used to succeed. Pope concluded that the high school the students attended may have been guilty of actually hindering what it wanted to achieve: "instead of fostering in its students traits such as honesty, integrity, cooperation and respect, the school may be promoting deception, hostility and anxiety" (p. 150).

Nicholl (2007) studied the challenge faced by adolescents aged 12-15 as they attempted to move beyond descriptions of them such as "disruptive," "rude," "confrontational," and "without ambition." Nicholl's study provided the teens with the

opportunity to organize lessons for younger students. Nicholl monitored the students' teaching experiences to determine whether these opportunities helped to change the way the "disruptive" students were seen by others, and in the way these students saw themselves (p. 263). In short, Nicholl wondered whether the responsibility to plan and deliver lessons to younger students could be a successful strategy in helping "negative leaders" become "positive leaders" (p. 277). Nicholl concluded that the teaching opportunity gave students, "a chance to show a different self and for that self to be noticed, by some teachers at least, and respected" (p. 279). This study allowed participants to be treated respectfully, given responsibilities and challenges with appropriate support; in short, to be treated in an adult-like manner, something students report they desire at school (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, p. 77).

Researchers have also highlighted how culturally and linguistically diverse students experience school (Dias-Greenberg, 2003; Flores-Gonzales, 2002; Minichiello, 2001; Norrid-Lacey & Spencer, 2000; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; B. Rubin, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Thompson, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). In a series of research reports, Howard (2001, 2002, 2003) detailed findings from studies with African American students. In the first study, Howard (2001) spoke to elementary and high school students from four urban schools to gauge students' perceptions of teachers whose pedagogical practices and classroom climates were deemed culturally relevant in an earlier study. Interview data revealed the students preferred teachers who created family-type classrooms, communicated with students in affirming ways, made learning fun and demonstrated care

for students.

In his second study Howard (2002) focused on students' interpretations of their learning environments and, "the degree to which students believed their academic and social achievement was influenced by teacher pedagogy" (p. 426). Howard presented three strategies identified by participants as most important for their academic and social achievement: a) teachers' establishment of familial characteristics in the classroom; b) teachers' development of culturally connected caring relationships with students; and c) teachers' use of specific kinds of verbal communication and affirmation (p. 425).

In the final report, Howard (2003) interviewed African American students at an urban high school to ascertain their perceptions on their academic identities and college aspirations. The participants in Howard's high school study indicated that they believed their academic identities were influenced in part by parental roles, teachers' and counselors' perceptions, and the students' overall interest in pursuing college.

Oftentimes, researchers studying students from particular cultural or linguistic backgrounds will address the ways these students "construct and reconstruct their multiple identities" (Thiessen, 2007, p. 37). Many examples of this studies that exemplify this trend exist (e.g. Bullough, 2007; Connolly, 1998; Curdt-Christiansen & Maguire, 2007; Flores-Gonzales, 2002; Gallas, 1997; Goldstein, 2003; Thorne, 1993). These kinds of studies demonstrate the degree to which students' school experiences are often *layered*. They show how students' cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic identities bare on their day-to-day school experiences.

According to Thiessen (2007), researchers attending to student voice “recognize that students have both authorship of and authority in their lives at school” (p. 54). In the next section of this review, I present studies that provided students with an opportunity to express their authorship through higher levels of participation in Fielding’s (2001) typology. In the studies that follow, students were invited to participate in research studies as co-researchers, working collaboratively with adults.

Students as Co-Researchers and Researchers

Researchers have argued that there is a link between effective instructional practices and teachers’ knowledge of their students’ learning styles and strengths (Alton-Lee & Nuthall, 1998). This has led to research interest in bringing students and teachers together to discuss instruction collaboratively. Several studies invited secondary students to share their perspectives on their teachers’ instruction (Cook-Sather, 2006a; Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007; Kane & Maw, 2005). Researchers hoped to use these conversations as tools to help both preservice and practicing teachers improve their teaching practice. In commenting on the impact of one such effort a teacher observed, “*I need student input and energy in order to sustain myself as an energetic and passionate teacher... I find myself asking for lots of student perspective and input in both formal and informal ways*” (Cook-Sather, 2006a, p. 352).

Teachers are not the only persons to benefit from such studies. Students gain insights about the challenges and difficulties involved in teaching, and may appreciate the

efforts that good teachers make on behalf of their students. A New Zealand high school student quoted in Kane & Maw (2005), is particularly persuasive on this point:

This whole research project helped me better appreciate not only the teachers we were working with but all my teachers, as I learnt to evaluate and spot qualities I hadn't noticed before. In trying to find fault with them I realised how good they actually were. So much depends on the teacher. Regardless of the subject, the teacher has the power to make you look forward to the class or dread it. (p. 316)

While some have argued that getting descriptive feedback from students should be considered as “part of the larger scheme of reflective practice” (Rodgers, 2006, p. 231), not all teachers will respond positively to student input. Some teacher participants in Pedder and McIntyre (2006) study reported that they felt there was “little of instrumental value” (p. 156) to be gained from their students’ opinions about their instruction. The researchers found that even for those teachers who initially responded favorably toward eliciting students’ input, the early successes weren’t sustainable (p. 156). The teachers didn’t persist in their attempts to include student voice as a routine aspect of their classroom practice. Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the importance of providing students with opportunities to direct classroom discourse, and advocates teachers take on the role of facilitators for learning (Santamaria, 2009). For teachers who hope to infuse culturally responsive pedagogy into their classroom practice, getting student perspectives on instruction is essential. Although some teachers may resist or question incorporating student voice, the potential benefits of eliciting student voice as a

tool to enhance instruction seem worth the effort.

Researchers have also encouraged student participation as co-researchers in conjunction with school reform projects (e.g. Kaba, 2000; P. Lee, 1999; Oldroyd & Tiller, 1987; Pekrul & Levin, 2007; Rudduck, et al., 1996; SooHoo, 1993; Wood, 1999; Yonezawa & Jones, 2007). Many researchers have written about allowing students to collaborate or take the lead in research projects. Scholars have invited students to work with them as collaborators throughout various phases of the research the process including posing questions, collecting and analyzing data, and writing and presenting research findings (P. Lee, 1999; Oldfather, 1995; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001).

Lee (1999), for example, designed his ethnographic study such that participants collaborated with him and acted as researchers by interviewing fellow students. His participants shared at least two of the following characteristics: having less than a 2.0 grade point average, excessive absences, and receiving two or more expulsions or suspensions from school (p. 217). Lee's participants (and the peers they in turn interviewed) had a number of suggestions for helping students like themselves. Recommendations included strategies for modifying instruction, repairing adult-student relationships and building a sense of community (pp. 238-239).

An unusual dual-position provided Merritt (2004) with the unique opportunity to train both her graduate level university students and her ninth grade English students in ethnographic research methods. Her high school students first learned how to develop an appropriate inquiry question and then were taught how to craft a study that would enable

them to explore their question in depth (Merritt, 2004). Students were then asked to conduct their studies and bring the results back for class discussion. Students' research interests ranged widely, creating studies that "explore[d] topics such as the existence of cliques in a church youth group, interactions between parents and their children on a local playground, and the way a biology teacher at [their] school adapted her instruction for two different classes" (Merritt, 2004, p. 407).

Merritt worked with graduate students enrolled in a reading instruction program. Merritt taught the university's final required course in the program, a year-long "teacher as researcher" class. Merritt argued that in an educational climate in which teachers are pressured to teach to the test, encouraging students to engage in the act of research provided them with the critical thinking skills that were transferable to other learning situations and contexts. For the college level students, Merritt believed the process of "doing research" helped the students make critical connections between educational theory and practice. "Teachers can become more than consumers of others' research if they feel empowered to analyze the process of their own practice" (Merritt, 2004, p. 416).

Frank, Arroyo, and Land (2004) similarly taught students basic research techniques, but their participants were culturally and linguistically diverse fifth graders in an urban school. The students' teacher was concerned that her students were unable to understand each other's decisions and actions. Believing that classroom disagreements were the result of misunderstandings, she hoped that by encouraging her students to systematically observe one another, while asking "why" questions, the students might

develop an appreciation of one another's motives (Frank, et al., 2004, p. 369). Over the course of the school year, each student was given the job of classroom ethnographer of the day. Engaging in the process of observing classroom events, taking notes on people's conversations, and even drawing pictures, "the research not only helped the students see reasons behind the actions of others, it also helped them base their thinking and writing on evidence they had collected by observing and listening" (Frank, et al., 2004, p. 372).

In an effort to counter the text reproduction activities that were taking place in her seventh grade language arts and social studies classes, one teacher-researcher taught her students how to write academic papers by encouraging them to engage in ethnographic research activities (Curry & Bloome, 1998). Students conducted research in their own communities, and later wrote and critiqued their own, and their classmates research, generating cross-cultural, comparative reports. Finally, and most importantly, students integrated the knowledge they'd gained from conducting their own research with what they learned by reading textbooks and other academic texts. This process helped the students learn to capitalize on their background knowledge when presented with academic reading tasks.

For the student participants in the studies presented above, "doing" research became a vehicle for learning more than just techniques and methods used by social scientists. The act of participating in research provided them with skills that could be applied to new learning situations. In the case of these studies, students were given more authority in the research process, and adults served as guides to help the students acquire

and share knowledge.

Unheard Voices

Despite some researchers' inclusion of students as young as second grade as participants (Evans, 2002; Howard, 2001), fewer researchers have focused on the experiences of children in the primary grades (Lord, 2005). This may be emblematic of dominant societal views of children's abilities (Lodge, 2005). Grace (1995) referred to adults' "ideology of immaturity" with regard to children. This ideology "gets in the way of [adults] seeing students as responsible and capable young people" (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 225). This is unfortunate because, As Dahl (1995) argued,

If school is really about what students know, value, and care about, we need to know who students really are. We need to listen to them, [and] pay attention to what they show us about themselves and their views, [to] build classroom worlds that support and teach in light of these insights.

(p. 124)

When we reach out to students who have been marginalized, "we give them an important message about their importance in the teaching/learning cycle and we show them that their perceptions and beliefs are not only important, but deserve our inquiry and respect" (Caporrimo, 2001, p. 1). Theories about how to improve schools should not be based on the insights of adults alone. What 'other people's children' (Delpit, 1995) have to say about their schools is important not only as a meaningful step toward improving the

schools, curriculum, and instruction for those students, but as a means of giving children equal footing as stakeholders in their education. If children in the United States spend approximately 15,000 hours of their lives at school (Holmes, 1995), then research focused on students' perspectives of those hours is warranted. This dissertation study was designed to be a step in that direction.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

Methodology has been described as evidence that harmony exists among the various aspects of a study, including the significance of the research problem, the questions asked, the appropriateness of the data collection and analysis methods used, and the defensibility of the interpretations and conclusions that ultimately are drawn (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Qualitative research is not a singular approach to research, and better is understood as a landscape of different methodologies, theoretical perspectives and techniques, rather than a singular approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In addressing my research questions, I drew on influences from the qualitative traditions of phenomenology and narrative analysis, incorporating techniques like thematic analysis and the constant comparative method. Borrowing from different traditions and methods, helped me capitalize on the strengths of these approaches, and it provided balance and perspective to my inquiry process. I will now explain some of the distinguishing characteristics of these approaches and how their incorporation enhanced this study.

Phenomenology

Broadly defined, phenomenology is the study of peoples' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology was appropriate for the goals of the study, because my

purpose was to research students' everyday schooling experiences. Two different perspectives have evolved within phenomenology: descriptive and interpretive. I've used an interpretive phenomenological slant in this study. In order to demonstrate why I draw from the interpretive perspective and not the descriptive, I provide an overview of both approaches below, beginning with the descriptive approach.

Descriptive phenomenology is also referred to as Husserlian, or eidetic phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). A key assumption of the descriptive approach to phenomenology is that people's experience is worthy of scientific study, and, it is argued, the study of those experiences should be subjective. The descriptive approach requires that a researcher "bracket," or set aside personal beliefs or opinions about a particular subject in an effort to avoid being overly influenced during the inquiry process (Lichtman, 2006; van Manen, 1990). In pursuit of this bracketing goal, some researchers have gone so far as to suggest that research questions or reviews of literature be pursued only *after* the analysis of data has started (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 20).

It is my interest in both description and *interpretation* of lived experiences that is reflected by the hermeneutic approach to phenomenology. This approach differs from Husserlian phenomenology since the interpretive branch, "goes beyond mere description of core concepts and essences to look for meanings embedded in common life practices. These meanings are not always apparent to the participants but can be gleaned from the narratives produced by them" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728). It is important to clarify that these meanings were not simply stumbled upon, but "negotiated mutually in the act of

interpretation” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 302).

It would be impossible for me to accept the notion that I could neatly set aside my classroom teaching experiences so that they did not influence my authorship of this dissertation. Instead, I believe my primary responsibility was not to try to prevent these experiences from influencing my interpretations of data, but rather, to acknowledge when and how they did. In this sense, understanding as part of the inquiry process was not achieved by attempting to set aside my viewpoints. As Schwandt argues, “on the contrary, understanding requires the *engagement* of one’s biases” (2003, pp. 301-302, italics in original).

Interpretive phenomenological methods with children require researchers study participants on their own terms, and from their perspectives, in order to better understand the phenomenon of interest (Waksler, 1991). Another important consideration is that data collected from interviews with students should not be confused with a perfect rendering of those students’ experiences. van Manen (1990) is particularly helpful on this point:

all recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already *transformations* of those experiences. Even life captured directly on magnetic or light-sensitive tape is already transformed at the moment it is captured. (p. 54)

As the author of this dissertation I knew in advance that I would receive transformations of my participants schooling experiences at best. Nevertheless, I felt there was much to be

gained from studying these transformations, and I was certain participants' stories would prove insightful and useful for informing the field of education.

Narrative Analysis

The second research tradition I drew from in this study is narrative analysis. According to Rankin-Brown (2006), "Narrative research recaptures the art of storytelling and draws attention to its important role in sharing knowledge with others" (p.3). Narrative fit well with the goals and overarching research questions for this study because of the emphasis on literally understanding the "whole story." Webster and Mertova (2007) explained the ways in which narrative research complements studies in education. The researchers state,

narrative analysis, contributes to research on teaching and learning through its ability to frame the study of human experience. Narrative can tap the social context or culture in which teaching and learning takes place. Just as a story unfolds the complexities of characters, relationships, and settings, so can narrative illuminate complex problems in teaching and learning. (p. 12)

I believe narrative analysis provided me with the tools necessary for grappling with participants' responses about their schooling experiences in a powerful and compelling manner. In narrative analysis, researchers are charged with the responsibility of moving between data in the form of interview transcripts, say, and as authors of the study, bring to the final written record, "not a ...literal account of history, but rather the fiction that is a

faithful representation of the participants' lives as they see them..." (Coulter, Michael, & Poynor, 2007, p. 108).

There is an inherent contradiction in any research study that attempts to center on student voice. Listening, according to Schultz (2003), is typically thought to be benign, but she cautions that listening can easily become coercive and shift into a form of surveillance (p. 105). Although this study was designed in an effort to incorporate students' voices, as the author, I was the architect. I decided, for instance, which quotes to include, how those quotes would be framed, and what theoretical lenses would undergird data analysis. I anticipated from the outset of this study, therefore, that some degree of tension would characterize my role as researcher as I negotiated between satisfying the goal of incorporating student voice while contending with the realities of the dissertation process. Despite the challenges, I believed I would find ways to strike a balance between the voices of my participants and my voice as the author and interpreter of this study.

Combining the traditions of narrative analysis and interpretive phenomenology provided me with useful lenses for researching the lived experiences of a group of culturally diverse elementary school children. The stories they tell about their school experiences shed light on the world adults inhabit for a time, and then exit as they reach maturity. The experience of school easily becomes reified in the adult memory. The near universal nature of schooling makes it easy for adults to assume they know and understand what school is like for children. I believe there is inherent value in taking time to rediscover

what it means to be in school, to be schooled, and to experience school through the students' accounts. In the next section, I describe aspects of the study including the research site, sampling techniques, recruitment strategies, and I conclude with an introduction to my research participants.

Research Site

Although I was interested in students' perspectives about their schools and their teachers, schools did not serve as research sites for this study. I hoped that by choosing to interview students away from school, the children would be more relaxed and better able to speak about their experiences as students in totality. I felt strongly that using a location other than a school as a research site would help encourage frankness in responses. Weiss's (1994) observation that "if you interview people in their offices they are much less likely to discuss problems with coworkers" (p. 58), suggests that talking to children in the classroom setting might make them uncomfortable sharing anything other than positive comments. Conducting my study at a "neutral" (in this case, a non-school site) location away could not guarantee participants were completely open in their responses, but there was at least a greater likelihood that children were more likely to be candid when they did not need to fear being overheard by their teachers or classmates.

I chose to conduct all my interviews at The Learning Center,¹ a neighborhood chapter of a nation-wide network of nonprofit afterschool programs. The Learning Center

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all names, places, and organizations appearing throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms.

(hereafter TLC) provides educational and enrichment opportunities for students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. While at TLC students could take classes in swimming, music, dance, art, technology, and a variety of team sports. In addition, TLC supported students' academically through an educational center called The Study Hub. Prior to beginning recruitment, I volunteered in The Study Hub providing students with homework help. I continued to assist students in this way, whenever I was able to throughout the period I collected data for my dissertation. Several of the students I assisted while working as a volunteer at TLC were participants in this study, but the majority were not.

The Learning Center is located on a busy street in an urban neighborhood of a large city in New England. Across the street from the center are two large community churches, and another congregation rented space inside TLC for Sunday services. Albert Lock, an executive staff member at TLC explained to me that these local churches served as de-facto community centers, but only on the weekends, "because that's when *we're* closed" ² (Field notes, 11-24-09). The Learning Center functioned as much more than an after school program, it served students, their caregivers, and the community at large in a variety of capacities. During my study I observed that various community agencies used TLC as a location to: provide printed information to the public, hold meetings on community concerns, such as staying protected from the H1N1 virus, coordinate the distribution of materials ranging from athletic shoes and mouth guards to free turkeys to citizens on a

² Any quotes from individuals originating from my research notes constitute my best recollections of conversations that were written up as soon after they occurred as possible.

restricted income.

Sampling Techniques and Recruitment

I used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques to recruit participants who were in different grades, attended different schools, and represented different cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups. Since I was a volunteer at TLC, I sent copies of my recruitment brochure, consent and assent forms home with children I'd been working with who expressed interest in participating in my study. This technique was not successful. At the end of two weeks, I had only one set of signed consent and assent forms. I discussed the problem with Brenden Burke, the director of The Study Hub, and he suggested an approach that was more in keeping with the culture of TLC.

Brenden furnished me with a small table to place in the main lobby of TLC. Rather than spending my afternoons helping students with their homework as I had been doing, I left the Study Hub and spent several nights in TLC's lobby. I placed a large, freestanding poster board on the table, which included information about the study, goals, overarching questions, and my need for volunteers. The wording for the poster information was taken from IRB approval stamped letters consent, assent and my recruitment brochure. Copies of these forms appear in Appendices A, B, and C, respectively. As caregivers entered the lobby, I introduced myself, handed them a copy of my recruitment brochure and invited them to review the material at their convenience. I stated I would be in the lobby at my recruitment table until a sufficient number of participants had turned in completed consent

and assent forms. Brenden's suggestion enabled me to recruit eighteen participants in just a week's time. Out of the initial recruitment group, a total of sixteen children ultimately chose to participate in this study.

Describing my professional role to parents and children was approached with some degree of care. I felt if I introduced myself as a teacher, there was a risk I might alienate the students I wanted to talk to. If, on the other hand, I only described myself as a student, I could gain a small degree of solidarity, but the description would have been only partially truthful. For this reason, I decided to tell each participant the complete truth: that I used to be a teacher, but I had not taught children for years.

One of the issues that I could not work around was the reality that I wanted to interview children whose cultural, linguistic and racial backgrounds differed from mine. Siedman (2006) has argued that, "it would be an unfortunate methodological situation if African Americans could only interview other African Americans...and Whites only other Whites" (p. 100) and other scholars have also asserted that researchers need not be from the same culture or race as the communities they study (e.g. Milner, 2007; Tillman, 2002). I certainly would not want my race to automatically preclude me from being able to conduct research with "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995). However, like Seidman (2006) I was not so naive as to imagine that differences between researchers and participants are immaterial. Since I intended to interview children outside my own race, ethnicity, and culture, I felt it was important to be sensitive about the techniques I used.

Since research has demonstrated that outward appearance, including dress, can

significantly affect how respond to researchers (e.g., Labov, 1970) (e.g., Labov, 1970), I deliberately dressed more casually than I would have dressed as a classroom teacher. Conversing casually with participants outside of interviews was another simple way for me to keep my interactions with the children informal. Regular conversations at TLC helped to dismantle some of the barriers between my participants, their families, and me. These efforts, combined with ice-breaker interview activities such as doodling, scratch art, and even the application of fake fingernails, helped me maintain a less intimidating presence.

Participants

The students I interviewed attended one of three different school types: public urban, public suburban, or public charter. A total of ten girls and six boys participated in this study. As is clear from the chart, participants attended one of three different school types: public urban, public suburban, and public charter. Students who attended public suburban schools did so because they were participants in an inter-district bussing program. Table 2 introduces participants, providing demographic information. Prior to discussing the data sources for this study, I briefly introduce each participant below.

Alyssa

Alyssa attended a public charter school that featured a music emphasis. Each student received instrumental music lessons as part of the regular school day. Alyssa told me that a special memory from her schooling experiences was the day she was able to bring her violin home for the first time. She stated that on that afternoon, “I remember me

and my mom and my violin teacher playing *Hot Cross Buns* for me. And I had to play it back and my mom clapped.”

Baller

Baller went to a public suburban school located in an affluent neighborhood. Baller loved participating in sports and enjoyed playing video games with friends. He explained that he hated getting up early in the morning. I often sat with Baller on days when I had no interviews scheduled and assisted him with his homework. When asked, Baller described himself in this way: “I have cool glasses, I’m good at sports. I’m good at football, I’m good at baseball, I’m good at basketball, I’m good at soccer. I’m funny to others. And some people say my glasses look really good on me.”

DJ

DJ was the first student to agree to participate in this study. He is an only child, and loves technology and electronic gadgets of all sorts. He attended an urban public school. DJ believed he was a bit of a loner, but also explained that when he wanted friends, he had students to talk with. His favorite part of the school day was gym class. DJ was proud of the fact that he was adept at video games. He told me, “When I play video games I’m good because sometimes I can beat my mom and my stepdad!”

Joy

Joy was very enthused about the idea of earning a movie gift card as a result of her participation in this study. She explained that knowing her younger brother was too little to participate (and thus get a movie card of his own) made the concept of

participating even more enticing. Joy told me her favorite movie was the thriller *Final Destination 2*, because, as she put it, “I *like* scary movies, so it’s not really scary.”

Kiyyah

Kiyyah almost always entered TLC with her best friend in tow. The two girls went to the same activities together, ate dinner together and occasionally did their homework together. In describing herself, Kiyyah stated, “I’m good at math, social studies, reading, writing, I guess that’s it. And gym, art, library, [and] technology, but not music!”

Lola

Lola struck me as a child who took her role as an older sister very seriously. Lola often reminded her sister to take off her coat, hang up her backpack, and she insisted her sister sit next to her while the two girls completed their homework together. In the evenings, I sometimes spotted Lola eating dinner early so she could sit with her sister, in defiance of TLC rules for dinner times. When I asked Lola what she wanted to be when she grew up she replied, “I would like to be a doctor.”

Monét

Monét was a relative newcomer to TLC. She was in her first year as a member of the program. She explained her mother enrolled her because her hours had changed at work, requiring her to be gone in the afternoons. Generally speaking, Monét stated she liked TLC. A few of the students she attended school with also belonged to TLC and the girls enjoyed visiting together as they completed their assignments. Monét remarked that

her favorite part of the day was art class. She explained, “I love art, like, right now we’re designing ourselves a superhero.”

Powers

Powers surprised me during our third interview by telling me about a talent he’d never spoken of before. He described his interest in singing. He stated he was asked by the kids on his bus to sing “In the Jungle” as they drove to school that morning. He stated, “So I just sang my over all the way there.” Powers eagerly sang to me the song that his friends had so enjoyed.

Rhino

During my first interview with Rhino we spoke for more than forty-five minutes before the lateness of the day put a stop to our conversation. Rhino was quick to share her love of sports. She played on TLC’s baseball team, but told me she was impatient for winter to come so she could snowboard. Rhino was proud of her Dominican background, and her language abilities. She stated, “When I was five I used to travel alone to Dominican Republic, and I would learn a lot of Spanish over there.”

Rihanna

Rihanna chose her favorite singer’s name as her pseudonym. Rihanna explained that her favorite thing about school was “field day.” Field day was a favorite event according to Rihanna, because, “You get to do a bunch of activities. They set up activities, and you get to have ice cream and some of the teachers sing songs.”

Sade

Sade was initially very eager to participate in this study. Over time, her enthusiasm waned slightly, but she would surprise me from time to time by insisting I ask her questions even when I was waiting for another participant to arrive for a scheduled interview. A stray comment from Sade during a conversation at TLC led me to purchase self-adhesive nails for the two of us to apply during our final interview. Sade was very excited about putting on the fake nails, because, as she explained, “I’m, [in] a model[ing] program and it’s called Barbizon, and now I know how to model.”

Snake

Snake was perceived by many of the girls at TLC as a bit of a heartthrob. He was very popular and seemed to make friends easily. Snake was frustrated by what he saw as his weaknesses as a basketball player, but he enjoyed playing whenever he and his friends found free time. When I asked Snake how he handled the pressures of fifth grade he replied, “Well, I just go wit’ the flow.”

Streets

Streets and his sister both attended the same music emphasis charter school. His younger brother went to a local public school, because Streets stated his brother got into trouble frequently. He enjoyed learning to play an instrument, but Streets stated his favorite thing about school was being released early once a week. Streets explained that every Wednesday, “We get out of school at 11:45 and it’s pretty fun. We stop doing learning at 10:30, and, we play like recess when it’s done.”

Tashala

Even if Tashala's family hadn't agreed to let her participate in this study, I think she still would have found ways to tell me about her school experiences anyway. Tashala was pleased that I wore eyeglasses like she did. Despite Tashala's generally negative impressions about school, when I asked her how she'd feel about changing schools, she said it would upset her. When I asked why, she stated, "Because all my friends and my memories are at Essence Charter [pseudonym]."

Tommy

After speaking with Tommy for five minutes, I reached into my purse to offer him a tissue. I made a point of bringing tissues with me to all my subsequent interviews with him as well. His nose seemed to be perpetually runny which annoyed Tommy. He told me his favorite thing about school was when he had a substitute, because, "When we have substitute teachers, we um, we get to watch a movie instead of doing anything else."

Zariah

Zariah's two younger siblings always trailed after her as she entered TLC. She waited each day to make sure her brother and sister scanned their membership cards and watched them walk into The Study Hub to complete their homework if she had none of her own. Zariah's favorite thing about school was field day. She stated, "You get to play outside and play games and race, and they have a moonwalk, that thing that you bounce on? And they have obstacle courses, and they have better food than usual and they do face painting. And you get to stay outside for the whole day."

Data Sources

Three primary sources of data were collected and analyzed in this study. I used individual interviews, focus group conversations and invited drawings as tools for better understanding participants' school experiences. I describe each of these main sources below. I conclude this section with a chart (see Table 3) summarizing data sources.

Table 2: Demographic Information: Study Participants

Pseudonym (Number of Individual interviews)	Gender	Grade at start of study	School type	Cultural and linguistic groups (per students' descriptions)
Alyssa (1) One	F	5 th	Public Charter	Black
Baller (2) Two	M	3 rd	Public Suburban	Black/Haitian
DJ* (4) Four	M	4 th	Public Urban	Black/Haitian
Joy* (2) Two	F	3 rd	Public Urban	Latina/Spanish
Kiyyah (1) One	F	5 th	Public Charter	African American
Lola (3) Three	F	3 rd	Public Urban	Latina/Spanish

Monét* (2) Two	F	5th	Public Suburban	African American
Powers (3) Three	M	3rd	Public Charter	African American
Rhino (2) Two	F	5th	Public Suburban	Puerto Rican/Spanish
Rihanna* (4) Four	F	3rd	Public Suburban	Black/Haitian
Sade* (5) Five	F	4th	Public Urban	African American
Snake (1) One	M	5th	Public Urban	African American
Streets (2) Two	M	4 th	Public Charter	Black
Tashala* (4) Four	F	3rd	Public Charter	Black/Haitian
Tommy (3) Three	M	2nd	Public Suburban	Black
Zariah* (2) Two	F	5 th	Public Urban	Black/Haitian

* Indicates Focus Group Participants

Individual Interviews

In order to integrate multiple perspectives (Weiss, 1994) from participants' schooling experiences, qualitative interviewing was used as the primary data collection tool. The individual interview is argued to be a context in which young people feel greater comfort when with an unfamiliar adult (Punch, 2002). A semi-structured interview protocol (Lichtman, 2006; H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 1995) served to guide, but not dictate my interview conversations with students (see Appendix E). The semi-structured interview format provided me with list of similar topics to discuss with each participant, but also permitted a great deal of flexibility in terms of tailoring each interview to the individual (Lichtman, 2006). The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, which provided participants with the opportunity to interpret questions individually, and helped me avoid the tendency in which adult researchers keep the "upper hand" in a traditional question-answer routines (Lewis, 2002).

During each individual interview conversation, support for students' responses were based off many of the techniques described by Zwiers and Morrisette (1999). Some of the methods the two authors mention are frequently used in interviews with adult participants, such as paraphrasing, summarizing and clarifying; other techniques, however, are thought to be particularly helpful when an adult interviews a child. Comments that are encouraging, appreciating and empathizing help children feel comfortable and confident in the interview setting. According to Zwiers and Morrisette, encouraging comments are those, "statements that encourage without praising or statements of praise related to the

child's efforts during the interview" (p. 80). Appreciating comments let children know that their contributions to an interview are being recognized; while empathizing comments communicate that the adult researcher has understood the emotions shared by the child. I occasionally took notes during interviews, but this wasn't a practice I employed frequently. I did not want participants to feel I was not paying attention to what they were saying, so I kept note taking to a minimum.

Young children have a desire to please adults and often need feedback confirming that they are performing satisfactorily in an interview situation. Childrens's desire to please adults can be problematic for researchers; Lewis (2002) cautions, for example, that it is imperative researchers ensure the questions they ask are not presumptive because, "generally children have a bias toward confirming what is put to them, so it is important to ask about both sides of an issue" (p. 113). Since my participants were all students, answering questions about schooling experiences was a relatively easy undertaking. First-hand knowledge of their own schooling experiences also increased the likelihood that their responses would be accurate (Zwiers & Morrisette, 1999).

Focus Groups

In addition to the individual interviews two focus group interviews were conducted. Focus group interviews provided students with an opportunity to share their collective perspectives about their schooling experiences. I felt it was important to include focus group interviews because the types of conversations that occur during a focus group may

be very different from those that take place during a one-on-one interview. Morgan (2004) suggests, for example, that it is important to consider using focus groups in situations, “where there is a difference in perspective between the researchers and those with whom they need to work” (p. 266). In this study, I undoubtedly had a perspective that differed from my participants. Differences in age, race, ethnicity, and gender made the incorporation of a focus group extremely important. It has been suggested that power differentials between adults and children may be at least partially mediated through the use of statements as prompts in group interview conversations (Lewis, 2002, p. 113), which would make the inclusion of focus groups a potential equalizing factor for this study.

Researchers who work with young participants argue there are distinct advantages and disadvantages to the use of either group or individual interviews (Lewis, 1992). For example, Punch’s (2002) participants were asked what form of interview they preferred and a significant number of them favored the individual interview. The children appreciated individual interviews because one-on-one conversations allowed students to share more personal information and experiences. These interviews promoted a feeling of confidentiality and also limited the possibility of being interrupted (Punch, 2002, p. 48). However, many of the young people in Punch’s study found focus groups were helpful as well. In the group format, students stated they felt supported by their peers, which led to feelings of increased confidence. In addition, students felt the small group format was particularly useful in that it provided participants with an opportunity to approach topics holistically. Like Punch (2002), I believe that combining focus group and individual

interview data enables a researcher to capitalize on the strengths of both approaches. Certainly, the focus group format allowed for interaction among participants, and the children I interviewed seemed to enjoy being able to converse with one another as much, if not more than conversing with me alone. Appendix E includes the interview protocol for the focus groups I completed. This protocol includes a handful of questions I created as “ice-breakers.”

Invited Drawings

Drawing is believed to reveal children’s inner thoughts (Grieg & Taylor, 1999), a task in which many children express a sense of competence (Christensen & James, 2000), and an effective tool for enhancing communication between researchers and children (O’Kane, 2000). Simply put, drawings seem to help children more easily express what they know and want to say. In his book on using visuals in qualitative research, Banks (2007) states, “visual research should be seen as only one methodological technique among many to be employed by social researchers, more appropriate in some contexts, less so in others” (p. 4). In this study, drawings provided additional insights into participants’ perspectives. As a form of data in which the students have full control, it was hoped that the inclusion of drawings would serve as a tool to balance power differentials as well. Participants did not have direct input on the interview questions asked, but in creating their drawings, the students decided what was included or excluded, and who or what got depicted.

During the initial spring interviews, each child was invited to use crayons, pencils and markers to draw a picture of their school or classroom. Those students who did not want to complete a drawing were not required to do so. Students who participated in fall interviews were again invited to draw a picture, but this time they were provided with a book cover frame rather than a blank sheet of paper. This frame looked like the front cover of a book and served as a tool to encourage the students to provide commentary on their schooling experiences.

Many scholars have used elicited drawings as data in their research with young people. Nieuwenhuys (1996) for example, demonstrated that the “preferred activities of children such as games, story telling and drawing may be more effective in bringing out the complexities of their experience than methods and techniques used by adults (p. 3).” Haney, Russell, Gulek and Fierros (1998) used elicited drawings, in addition to surveys and data gleaned from assessments, as tools to foster improvement at the middle school level. In their work, the authors believed that the drawings promoted longer and more targeted dialogue, increased the degree to which teachers reflected on their practice, and served as a simple but powerful tool to demonstrate change in schools (Haney, et al., 1998, p. 39).

Analysis for visual images is both analogous to and distinct from processes used in the analysis of text. For example, van Manen (1990) suggests art, (including children’s drawings) are types of texts that can be seen, heard, and even felt. As van Manen explained, pieces of art function as texts, “consisting of not a verbal language but a language nonetheless, and a language with its own grammar” (p. 74). In terms of how art can be

used as a tool for illuminating people's lived experiences, he argues, "because artists are involved in giving shape to their lived experience, the products of art are, in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations" (p. 74). This notion of art as transcended configurations of a person's lived experience brings the analysis and interpretation of art, or in the case of this study, students' drawings into question.

Researchers analyzing visual images have to be careful not to read onto those images (or texts, as van Manen would term them), experiences that do not exist for the artist. Indeed, the potential for researchers to ignore what children have to say about their own drawings is seen by Driessnack (2005) as a shortfall in using drawings. Research does offer solutions to the challenge raised by Driessnack. Some researchers, for example, analyze drawings using a multistage process in which confirmation of findings is a research goal (e.g. Haney, et al., 1998). In such cases, researchers strive to code elements in drawings in the same way, so that different researchers would consistently note similar findings from a particular image. Some researchers promote reliability through the use the use of checklists, inter-rater reliability tests, formal content analysis or other techniques (Haney et al., 1998; Banks 2007).

I analyzed visuals as individual "texts," from a holistic approach suggested by Riessman (2008), and I also analyzed the texts produced during interviews as students talked with me about what they were drawing. By focusing on drawings alongside portions of interview transcripts in which my participants spoke about what they were creating, I feel I managed to stay much closer to my participants' ideas about drawings. In fact,

asking students to describe what they're drawing and why, and then listening carefully to children's responses is one way to ensure interpretations of drawings match children's intended meanings (Coad & Evans, 2007; Driessnack, 2005).

In order to better understand the perspectives children of color had about their schooling experiences, asking students to express their knowledge and perspectives through visual images, as well as with words, was invaluable. Drawings provided insights into how children experienced school that may not have been addressed in interviews. Furthermore, I believe the students' drawings were useful tool for sparking conversations and eliciting additional stories. For some of my participants, for example, contributing drawings was a particular highlight of the interview experience. Research offers some additional advantages for including the use of visual artifacts along with more traditional techniques such as interviews. As Banks (2007) noted, "very often, the addition of visual methods can bring an added dimension, particularly in realms where the knowledge sought is beyond the range of language" (pp. 115-116). In the case of one research team, the authors believed the inclusion of drawings was almost transformative:

The students were able to express themselves in different ways: drawing, talking, listening, and discussing. By giving the students voice and space this way, the research not only added to our understanding of students' lived experiences of well-being, but increased their well-being in the process. (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009, p. 254)

Initially, my goal was to conduct at least two one-on-one interviews with each

child. I also hoped to hold two focus group conversations with small groups of participants. In the end, I conducted only a single interview with some participants and as many as four or five with others. When second interviews weren't possible, it was usually because of a scheduling issue or a participant's desire to end their involvement after one conversation. I held focus group conversations with two different groups of participants. Table 3 summarizes the data sources and totals for this study.

Transcription

I transcribed all my participants' individual and focus group interviews myself. It was a huge undertaking, and the process took far longer than I initially thought it would take. I found transcription to be thoroughly engaging work. Prior to describing the transcription process I used in this study, I present some of the scholarship on transcribing. The significance of transcription is underscored by Kvale (1996) who argued, "by neglecting issues of transcription, the interviewer's road to hell is paved with transcripts" (p. 166). Transcripts of interviews, observations, and focus group conversations are central to qualitative research (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005).

Despite the centrality of transcripts, the processes of transcription, and the links between the quality of transcripts and the quality of the research they support garners relatively little research attention (Poland, 2003; Wellard & McKenna, 2001). Scholars suggest this is the result of the enduring myth of transcription as an objective, mechanistic endeavor (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997; Tilley & Powick, 2002). In fact, transcription

Table 3: Data Sources, Descriptions, and Totals

<u>Data Source:</u>	<u>Descriptions:</u>	<u>Totals:</u>
Individual Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of interviews with each participant ranged from 1 to 5. • The length of interviews ranged from fifteen to forty-five minutes • Individual interviews generated more than 400 typed pages of transcripts. 	41 Individual interviews with a total of sixteen (16) participants
Focus Group Conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 Students participated in one of two focus group conversations. • Six out of the seven focus group participants were female. • Each focus group conversation lasted approximately forty-five minutes. 	2 Focus group conversations with a total of 7 participants
Drawings and Artifacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants were invited, but not required, to contribute drawings and artifacts. • The number of drawings and artifacts contributed by each participant ranged from 0 to 3. 	25 Drawings and artifacts were collected and analyzed.
Field Notes and Research Memos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes were taken following any informal conversations with participants at the research site, and while at the research site. Notes were generally not taken during interviews so as not to distract participants. • Analytic notes were typed into interview transcripts as appropriate and research memos were written on a regular basis. 	121 typed pages of field notes and memos were analyzed.

is not a neutral process; it is fundamentally theoretical and interpretive work (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998; Ochs, 1979). Ochs, for instance, stated that “transcripts are the researcher’s data,” that transcribing is “selective,” and that transcription reflects the “theoretical goals and definitions” of a study (p. 44). Transcribing is also representational work. Clifford (1986) argues, for example, that “stories are built in the representational process itself.” This means that every decision made by a transcriber tells a story, or tells *part* of a story. It makes sense, therefore to consider what stories are being told and for what purposes (C. Roberts, 1997).

Poland (2003) provides an excellent demonstration of the interpretive nature of transcription. He shows how the same words are given very different meanings based on a transcriber’s use of punctuation. In the first example, Poland’s sentence reads, “I hate it, you know. I do.” In the second case, the sentence reads, “I hate it. You know I do” (p. 270) In his second example, the order of the words remains the same, but the meaning is changed, the tone more emphatic. Periods and commas give different meanings to the same words. Over the course of an entire study researchers are likely to encounter multiple occasions where they must determine how an utterance heard on tape is to be translated into a transcript. Such decisions are neither objective nor automatic. Each choice includes or excludes particular meanings (Ross, 2010).

What is evident from the descriptions above is the reality that transcripts are not “talk written down” (Green, et al., 1997, p. 172). Transcribing is complicated, and unwise to think of transcripts as “truthful replications” of recorded talk (Tilley, 2003). Whenever a

transcript is viewed, the reader is examining, at best, a translation of something heard on a recording to a textual rendering of that recording (Dortins, 2002; Slembrouck, 2007). This is why, for instance, Wellard and McKenna (2001) refer to the transcription process as a “re-writing” of interviews (p. 181).

Unlike Agar (1996) who famously referred to transcribing as “a chore” (p. 153), I found transcribing all my interviews myself incredibly rewarding. In an effort to make interviews read like natural speech, I created two sets of transcripts. The first set included all verbal disfluencies, placeholders (such as like, or um), and repetitions retained. I listened to interview tapes again, reading off the initial transcript as I did so. Following this second listening to tapes I created the transcripts appearing in this dissertation. In these transcripts, I excluded the disfluencies and those repetitions I determined (based on my recollection of the interviews, notes and students’ tone of voice) students had not restated for emphasis, but simply to fill conversational silences as children gathered their thoughts. Thus the transcripts appearing in this dissertation are in many ways very similar to my initial set of transcripts, but the language is “cleaned up” of the distracting elements mentioned above that can make reading a transcript (without benefit of simultaneously listening to the original tapes) difficult (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004).

Although some researchers advocate adoption of specific sets of conventions that dictate how conversational elements (such as the lengths of pauses, rising and falling intonation) will be noted in transcripts, (Bucholtz, 2007; Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, & Paolino, 1993) others argue against this practice. Lapadat (2000) believes, for

instance, that transcription notation will differ for researchers based on the theoretical and methodological foci of their studies. Duranti (2006) reasons that most researchers develop hybrid, rather than standardized systems for transcription notation, “borrowing what they find useful for their purposes from various traditions” (p. 301). For my part, I found many of the existing notation systems distracting and cumbersome to work with and I developed a simplified system of my own. This decision is supported by research. MacLean, Meyer and Estable (2004) argue that the, “inclusion of highly detailed notation in interview transcription purposes can, indeed, be counterproductive” (p. 116). Other scholars also suggest that streamlined systems for transcript notation are valuable (Duranti, 2006; Ochs, 1979).

Table 4 details the transcript notations used throughout this dissertation. As is clear from the chart, I use brackets to indicate words I’ve added to students’ utterances, parentheses to separate out non-verbal aspects of speech such as sighing, laughing, shrugging shoulders, and so on, and I describe silences as either a “pause” or a “long pause.” Pauses are any amount of time less than two seconds, and long pauses are any amount of time more than three seconds. The transcripts that appear throughout this dissertation are necessarily selective (Duranti, 2006), and I believe they are better as a result. Ochs (1979, p. 44) argued that overly detailed transcripts are difficult to follow and hard to evaluate. By using the same notations throughout all my transcription work, and including only those details that I deemed necessary for contextual understanding I believe the transcripts in this dissertation are both consistent and clear.

Table 4: Transcript Notation

Notation:	Indicates:
[Single Brackets]	Single brackets indicate researcher-added letters or words.
(Parentheses)	Parentheses are used to delineate nonverbal aspects of conversation like sighing, or shrugging shoulders, and provide contextual descriptions.
(Pause)	This notation refers to a short pause, lasting two seconds or less.
(PAUSE)	This notation refers to a long pause, lasting more than two seconds.
—	Dashes indicate midsentence shifts to new topics or sentences.
...	Three ellipses denote places where the researcher has omitted nonessential words within a single sentence for the sake of preserving continuity.
....	Four ellipses denote places where the researcher has omitted nonessential transcript material of one sentence or more for the sake of preserving continuity.
<i>Italics</i>	Italics is used to indicate whenever participants' volume level or tone of voice was inflected for emphasis.

Data Analysis

During the first phase of data analysis I listened to and transcribed each interview for analysis. I used microcassette transcription equipment that included a foot pedal. As I played back each interview I listened to short segments, used the foot pedal to pause the recording, and typed up what I heard, according to the procedures described in the transcription section above. I printed multiple copies of each transcript. I printed out one set of transcripts and took notes in the margins. Additional copies were used during the coding process.

Riessman (2008) explains, “although narrative analysis is case-centered, it can

generate ‘categories’ or, to put it differently, general concepts, as other case-base methods do” (p. 13). In thematic narrative analysis, the content of the narrative, rather than its structure is the exclusive focus. Each narrative is kept “intact for interpretive purposes” (Riessman, 2008 p. 74). Narrative analysis is case centered, where other forms of thematic analysis (like grounded theory) attempt to theorize *across* cases. Some narrative researchers, however, *do* engage in comparisons of complete stories across cases (see for example, Ewick & Silbey, 2003). A similar approach was used for this study. Riessman defines narratives as “bounded segment[s] of interview text[s] about an incident” (p. 75). For the purposes of this dissertation, an “incident” was any classroom-, school-, or relationship-centered story offered by a participant either in response to a question I asked, or spontaneously. A larger story, about a particular teacher, occasionally contained an embedded story about an annoying classmate. In my analysis, I treated both incidents as separate stories. As a result, the lengths for the students’ narratives varied. Individuals provided stories that were more or less elaborate based on their own experiences or interest in the questions being asked.

I analyzed my participants’ stories thematically. In keeping with tenets of narrative analysis as articulated by Riessman, (2008), I first considered students’ responses holistically, as individual stories. Since I was also very interested in comparing between and across cases, I found that a process of coding of transcripts into discrete categories for cross case comparisons was equally informative. The processes differed,

but the combination of the two approaches led to me toward more nuanced and ultimately, complicated understandings, as will be discussed in later chapters.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process research memos (Charmaz, 2004) were written, based on the questions and insights that developed. In an early memo, for instance, a casual remark to one of my newly recruited participants caused me to think more seriously about the degree to which I wanted to incorporate student voice.

I was impressed again this week with the willingness of children to partner with me on this project. One brother-sister pair has checked in with me almost daily to ask, “when will it [the study] start?” The girl asked me what the “name of it” was. I told her she could just call it, “Krista’s study.” As I thought about that driving home the other day, I realized that it was a lousy name to give a dissertation study purporting to elicit students’ voices. The subtleties may or may not be lost on the children, but this new name for the project is unsettling to me. I hope none of the kids take to referring to our work in this way. (Research Memo 04-15-09)

Using a coding and sorting procedure similar to one articulated by Weiss (1994), I wrote initial codes, formulations, and speculations (p. 155) in the margins of my transcripts. After reading through all my transcripts, I went back and re-read them again, this time paying careful attention to any categories or themes that appeared throughout, or at least through many of the interviews. I then moved on to a process of reading and coding collections of excerpts from a variety of interviews all dealing with similar issues

(p. 156). This is similar to what Fraser (2004) calls re-reading stories for “different domains of experience” (p. 191).

In order to complete this work I first printed copies of each student’s transcripts. As I read and re-read transcripts, I used scissors and cut out interview excerpts related to specific topics. I then grouped these related excerpts in labeled file folders. I found it very helpful to literally manipulate and sort my participants’ stories by hand, sorting and re-sorting stories into a constantly evolving set of manila folders. As I conducted this work, I identified nine different thematic categories. Initially, I labeled these categories myself: getting stuff (including extra help), rules are made to be broken, forms of resistance, yelling, and being bad, feeling welcome at school and in class, being picked on, some things are worth remembering, talking about talking and friendship as a blessing and a curse. As I reread transcript excerpts again, I realized renaming categories using the students’ words was a better choice. I felt using the students’ language to label categories was in keeping with how my participants were experiencing school. In the end the four broad themes that I developed best summarize interview data.

In collapsing categories I attempted to distinguish between essential themes and those that were incidental. According to van Manen, (1990), “in determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (p. 107). Although data were continually scrutinized for emerging categories and themes, in the analysis stage, issues that were salient for just a few pupils were not ignored.

Rather, individual responses as well as larger patterns of student responses were treated as *equal* sources of interest. An issue that was significant for a single participant may have impacted how they experienced school in general. Considering how individual students' stories differed from or mirrored other participants' accounts helped me gain a better understanding of how students were experiencing school.

Credibility

In a now classic book highlighting differing theoretical traditions in sociology, Giddens claims that "certain accounts count" (p. 83), a reminder of the importance of quality and credibility in qualitative research. Throughout this study I have worked to ensure that this study will qualify as credible and trustworthy. Parker (2003) argues that researchers have a responsibility to make clear how they believe their studies ought to be evaluated (p. 6). Criteria presented by Lichtman (2006) were particularly helpful to me as I conducted my research. The criteria are: researcher's role, convincing arguments, rich in detail, and communication.

Lichtman (2006) argues that a researcher's role is critical to the research effort, and that attempts at objectivity are unnecessary. According to Lichtman, since objectivity is a quantitative assumption researchers conducting qualitative inquiries need not try to divorce themselves from their work. Instead, Lichtman maintains that qualitative researchers should acknowledge the degree to which they are "in" their own work revealing

themselves, “through a process of self-reflexivity” (p. 192). Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggest that because researchers’ “personal biographies” shape their studies it is necessary for them to understand (and communicate) who they are in their research efforts (p. 36). In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I articulated the theoretical framework that undergirds this study. The theories presented influence my approach to data and my interpretations of those data, since data don’t speak for themselves (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 36). In keeping with Lichtman’s (2006) guidelines, in addition to revealing who I am as the researcher, I also try to reveal what I’ve learned about and from my participants, since they are collaborators in this process in many ways and *not* “nameless and faceless individuals who have been chosen at random to represent others with similar characteristics” (p. 192).

In addition to the necessity of clarifying the researcher’s role, Lichtman (2006) affirms the importance of convincing arguments as another of his four evaluation criteria. He sees convincing arguments as tools for highlighting what was studied and what was found, but Lichtman acknowledges that assessing this criterion is difficult. First, what matters (or would convince) one person might be of little interest to someone else. Nevertheless, he suggests that when researchers do their job well, they are able to communicate the importance of their topic, where their study fits in a larger context and why they chose to write about their topic to begin with and, most importantly, that the findings of the study go beyond mere reporting (Lichtman, 2006, p. 192).

Booth, Colomb and Williams (2003) suggest arguments be evaluated in terms of how they address the following four questions: (Please note the following questions are

paraphrases of Booth et al.'s original list.)

- 1) Is the evidence reliable and clearly connected to the researcher's claims?
- 2) Are the arguments appropriately qualified?
- 3) Does the report seem less like a contest between competitors and more like a conversation with colleagues who are amiable but have minds of their own?
- 4) What warrants are left unexpressed? (Booth, et al., 2003, pp. 217-218).

According to Booth et al., these questions are useful guidelines to assist researchers in determining how readers might reject their arguments. Throughout this dissertation I've attended to each of these questions, paying particular attention to the first and last question. I believe both Lichtman's (2006) call for convincing arguments and Booth et al.'s (Booth, et al., 2003) evaluation questions are valuable considerations for assessing the credibility of this study.

Qualitative research has long been associated with "thick description" (Denzin, 1989) and qualitative researchers' commitment to "write lushly" (Goffman, 1989, p. 131) in an effort to produce for their audience, "the feeling that they experience, or perhaps could experience" (Creswell, 2007, p. 194) the events they describe in their reports. Lichtman (2006) discussed description in qualitative research slightly differently. He argues that researchers ought to write with enough detail that readers have sufficient information to ascertain what was done in the study. He provides a series of questions researchers should ask in determining the degree to which they've provided rich details. One of these questions is whether readers can "determine what the researcher did, how she did it and

why it was done” (p. 192). In this dissertation, I include lengthy quotes from my participants’ interviews in an effort to provide rich, and thick details of events. I support these excerpts with explanations that shed further light on incidents or events as necessary. I believe that this chapter, in particular, has been written in such a way as to clearly present what I did, why I did it, and how those decisions were in keeping with the goals of this study.

The final criterion mentioned by Lichtman (2006) is communication. According to Lichtman, communication addresses the question of whether readers are convinced by the overall research presentation. He recognizes that the worth of any research report can be judged only by what is seen heard or read (p. 192). As such, Lichtman states that as readers, we have to determine for ourselves, “to what extent the writer reaches you by her presentation” (Lichtman, 2006, p. 192). He provides a series of elements that may serve as indicators of quality in written reports specifically since it is this format that is most common. Lichtman looks for and considers the following elements as he reads a research report: opening, engaging style, reflections, integration, rich detail, voices of others, justification and new meanings. He sees this list as a starting point for evaluating the degree to which a writer effectively communicates with her audience. As I’ve crafted this report, I have attempted to follow the guidelines presented above in an effort to create a study that is trustworthy and credible and a study that exhibits many hallmarks of quality.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Getting it”: Students’ Experiences with Learning

Introduction to Findings Chapters

The purpose of this study is to explain how a small group of children experienced elementary school. In this chapter, as in the three chapters that follow, I describe how I have understood the students’ schooling experiences by presenting my research findings and interpretations. I’ve organized findings according to the dominant themes I’ve developed as a result of analyzing data from individual interviews, focus group conversations, and collected student drawings. Excerpts from these interviews and reproductions of students’ drawings are presented as evidence of the four central themes of this study. The themes are: 1) “Getting it”; 2) “Different sides each day”; 3) “I know they were a kid once”; and finally, 4) “The reason why I keep it in.” The first theme centers on the experiences with learning. The second theme deals with students’ experiences with peers. The third theme showcases the children’s experiences with teachers, and the final theme focuses on students’ experiences with “voice” at school and throughout the research process. Each major theme stands as a separate findings chapter, and within each of the four main themes are smaller sub strands.

It is important to note that these themes are not mutually exclusive. As I listened to my participants’ stories, the topic of a given story invariably unfolded to encompass many aspects of school life. The themes I’ve created are undeniably linked, and

occasional overlap across major themes and even within the sub strands of a single theme is almost inevitable. It is likely that researchers working from different theoretical frameworks, drawing from different sets of experiences would apply alternate organizational patterns to these data.

In presenting my findings, I explain the theme being discussed, along with transcript excerpts that illustrate each theme. I have chosen to present longer, largely intact excerpts from interviews together with shorter quotes. In sharing extended interview segments certain stories can be studied as complete units, while short snippets make comparisons across cases easier. Researchers point to the benefits of within- and across case comparisons in a case study, phenomenological, narrative, and other qualitative research designs (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003; Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). I believe sharing these story “bites” as well as longer interview narratives enriches the findings presentation. Prior to presenting the first major theme, I provide a few thoughts about the students’ role as storytellers.

While my interpretations are paramount in this dissertation, I believe the students played an authorship role as well. Interview conversations became opportunities for the participants to co-construct stories about school and schooling experiences with me. On numerous occasions however, the students shifted the interview focus from the classroom to the world beyond school. In doing so, the students were able to tell me stories about the things that were of interest to them, even if those topics stretched (or were completely outside) typical school experiences. I am reminded, for instance, of Powers’ delight in

regaling me with stories about his current and former girlfriends, Tashala's penchant for telling me too much about her parents' post-divorce relationship, Sade's insistence that I tell stories to *her*, and Rhino's depiction of her Pitbull Terrier's bladder control problems. As I concluded the transcribing of the interviews, I was left with an abundance of material that clearly mattered to my participants, but was simply outside the purview of this study. I address these kinds of stories in the final findings chapter of this dissertation.

Genesis of the Theme: "Getting It"

This study centers on children's schooling experiences, from recess to reading and myriad aspects of school life. As initial interviews gave way to final conversations, it was clear that the one of the most salient experiences for the children I spoke to was "getting it." The exact phrase came from a statement made by DJ during our last interview. Ironically, his comment, "I'm still not getting it" was in response to my effort to better explain a poorly worded question. My clarification attempt ("What I'd like for you to do is, thinking about that list, to share some of your thoughts on any of those topics. Did that help? Does that make more sense?") was not successful and DJ's comment stuck with me. I was reminded of the other occasions I'd heard the students use the words "get it" in interviews. As I read and reread interview transcripts, "getting it" unfolded as one of the most salient schooling experiences for my participants.

As a theme, “getting it” relates to students’ perspectives on learning in school. Interview excerpts shed light on the ways “getting it” constituted a major part of students’ school lives. Within this theme are three sub strands. The first strand explores the pressure to get “it,” including the consequences of this pressure on students. The second strand features the evidence students’ used to determine whether they were “getting it” in school. The final strand highlights students’ experiences with *not* “getting it.” In order to explain what was behind the students’ focus on “getting it” I refer to a model proposed by Dweck and Leggett (1988). Since I refer to their model throughout this chapter, I describe the model below before launching into an exploration of the sub strands of the “getting it” theme.

Performance versus Learning Orientations:

A Model for Understanding Students’ Preoccupation with “Getting It”

In their research on motivation and personality, Dweck and Leggett (1988) developed a model for explaining how implicit “theories about oneself” (p. 256) predispose people toward the pursuit of one of two different orientations: performance goals and learning goals. The authors discussed their model primarily as it relates to the academic sphere, but they also demonstrated the potential of applying their model to other contexts. Throughout this chapter, I will demonstrate the ways Dweck and Leggett’s model illuminates my participants’ focus on “getting it.”

Dweck and Leggett (1988) surmised that people fell into two distinct patterns that influenced a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. In the first pattern, which the authors referred to as a "maladaptive 'helpless' response" (p. 256), people avoid challenges, exhibit a negative affect in the face of failure, and believe failure is the result of their own inadequacies. This helpless pattern leads people to give up when faced with obstacles or threats of failure. Dweck and Leggett argued that the helpless pattern was maladaptive because difficulty and barriers "are inherent in most important pursuits" (p. 257). Dweck and Leggett believed that this helpless pattern was a potential outgrowth of a performance goal orientation.

The second pattern identified by Dweck and Leggett is the "mastery-oriented" pattern. The researchers believed this pattern was an outgrowth of learning goal orientations. Unlike their "helpless" counterparts, people who are mastery-oriented actively seek out of intellectual challenges, display positive affect in the face of failure, and maintain the belief that failure is temporary and, with continued effort, reversible. Dweck and Leggett viewed the mastery-oriented pattern as adaptive because individuals generate helpful strategies when they encounter barriers and difficulties (p. 257).

Where the mastery-oriented pattern is argued to result from learning goal orientations, Dweck and Leggett suggest that the "helpless" pattern is an outgrowth of performance goal orientations. Performance and learning goal orientations differ in several ways. In terms of their academic achievement, performance goal oriented persons desire to have their intellectual competence in an area acknowledged. These students tend

to view intelligence as a fixed entity. This perspective on intelligence is the reason performance goal oriented persons strive to document their intelligence (p. 256). In other words, if a child believes she has high abilities, she may seek out challenges to prove her smartness. However, once this child faces the threat of failure, she will retreat from the academic challenge. In this regard performance goal orientations are not sustainable, even for intellectually gifted children. Regardless of ability, everyone will encounter at least the threat of failure in school. Children with performance goal orientations will seek to avoid situations where the threat of failure exists.

If students with performance goal orientations perceive they are lacking the innate ability to do well in something, they will deliberately avoid challenges in this area (Dweck & Leggett, 1988, p. 259). These students seek out easy tasks in an effort to ensure their success rather than failure will be documented. This is because these children believe intelligence is fixed not fluid. In sharp contrast, students with learning goal orientations are concerned with *growing* what they perceive as their intellectual capabilities. These individuals view intelligence as changeable, a capacity that can be developed and enhanced over time with sustained effort.

Regardless of an individual child's perceptions of his or her intellectual abilities (either low or high), challenges will be sought out, and even "relished" (Dweck & Leggett, 1988, p. 258) by students with learning goal orientations. This means that a child who feels she is not naturally gifted in reading "smarts" will approach a challenging reading task with eagerness if she holds learning goal orientations. She will view the

difficulty as a tool that will help her develop as a reader. A child with the same low perception of reading smarts who holds performance goal orientations will deliberately avoid challenge in reading for fear that his low skills will be made public.

According to Dweck and Leggett (1988), goal orientations influence children's beliefs about effort. A child with a learning goal orientation wants to need to work hard, or at least for protracted periods, in order to achieve success. Learning goal oriented individuals therefore, attribute success to their efforts. In sharp contrast, children with performance goal orientations believe hard work is a sign of a *lack* of competence in an area. These students believe that a lack of effort is associated with "being good at something" (pp. 260-261).

It is important to note that Dweck and Leggett (1988) did not suggest that performance goal orientations were always "bad" any more than they suggested learning goal orientations were always "good." The authors believed that students with the ability to adapt to learning situations relied on the coordination of both performance and learning goals. The issue is that research shows learning goal orientations make students, "less vulnerable to the effects of fluctuations in confidence" (p. 260). Students with orientations tending toward performance goals are at greater risk of choosing to avoid learning opportunities that might be very valuable out of fear of having their weaknesses exposed. The evidence suggests my participants were operating under performance goal orientations. I've appropriated the major tenets of their research as constructs for understanding my participants' preoccupation with getting it in school. I do so cautiously,

as Dweck and Leggett's original research was with college students, and supported by a theoretical framework that differs from this study. Despite these differences, I maintain that the broader ideas in Dweck and Leggett's prove useful for interpreting the accounts that follow.

Pretenders, Cheats, and Nervous Wrecks:

Student Responses to "Getting It" Pressure

The children used the phrase "getting it" (and various approximations) in order to express a sense of achievement and specifically to convey success in the mastery of tasks, skills, and concepts. For the children, learning and "getting it" were synonymous.

Transcripts suggest that my participants possessed performance goal orientations in regards to their academic achievement. Performance goal orientations lead the students to concentrate on "getting it," rather than on "discovering more" or "developing talents." In this sub strand, I address consequences for students related to the pressures of "getting it." I argue that one of the reasons the children possess performance goal orientations towards achievement is in response to experiences with external pressures. I suggest that policies and rhetoric of the accountability movement contribute to the pressure students experienced to show they were "getting it."

The students I spoke to indicated that they wanted to do well in school, and they spoke at length about the importance they, their parents, and their teachers placed on doing their very best. "Getting it" for students was akin to having demonstrated they had

done their best, but transcripts reveal the degrees to which the students worried their best was not good enough. In some cases, as is in the excerpt that follows, accountability pressures seemed to spill over into non-academic aspects of the schooling experience, suggesting that for some children, at least, the pressure to get it became part of the general schooling experience. Joy experienced this phenomenon. Her excerpt demonstrates that she felt compelled to pretend success in music class. She explained her decision in this way³:

I don't like music because we have to play the flute. And it's hard for me because I don't really know the notes. And I listen and all that, but I still can't get it right. So, I just don't like music because I'm the only one in the class who doesn't get it.

Joy later admitted she hadn't told her teacher she wasn't actually playing her flute when she stood up alongside her classmates. Faking competence was preferable from Joy's perspective because it prevented her failure from becoming public knowledge. This is in keeping with one of motivating factors in a performance goal orientation: a desire to avoid negative judgments about competence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Her desire to avoid negative judgments of her competence in music reflects Joy's performance goal orientation. Her commitment to excel at pretending to play the flute playing meant Joy

³ In all interview excerpts, I have omitted most disfluencies, verbal placeholders (e.g. "you know," "like," and "um"), and repetitions that would make the segment difficult to read or understand. All additions are bracketed. Parentheses are used when necessary to describe non-verbal communication, such as shrugging the shoulders, shaking the head "no," laughing, crying, etc. I italicize any word or words emphasized by the students.

wouldn't be able to play her instrument outside of school, but it protected her from having her failure acknowledged publicly. From Joy's perspective, it was preferable to perpetuate the illusion she'd mastered the instrument than risk a negative judgment of her abilities. Joy's method for pretending competence was unique among my participants. More often than not, pressures to "get it" prompted students to showcase abilities in a more conventional way.

Discussions about school experiences often led to descriptions of taking quizzes and tests, and these discussions prompted conversations about the pressure to cheat. Transcript excerpts about cheating episodes echo Joy's efforts to fake competency. Zariah believed cheating on tests was wrong, but when faced with another student's decision to gain an advantage on a test, she and her classmates decided to keep the matter to themselves. In the following excerpt, she describes witnessing a classmate cheat on the annual State Test, a standardized, high stakes examination.

Zariah: 'Cause on the math State Test the boy that was sitting in front of me was usin' the calculator.

Krista: Really?

Zariah: Yeah.

Krista: And the teacher didn't see?

Zariah: No, 'cause he had a folder up, and there was three taller people than him and me in front of him.

Krista: Did anybody tell the teacher he had a calculator during the test?

Zariah: No.

Krista: Why not?

Zariah: Because he said don't tell on him and don't tell the teacher.

Krista: And you were afraid to tell? [Short portion of transcript deleted.]

Zariah: I wasn't like afraid to tell, but I just didn't want to tell, 'cause then I would have get into the, whole bunch of drama and stuff.

Krista: I see. It wasn't worth it to tell?

Zariah: Mm, hmm. [it wasn't worth it].

When the students in Zariah's class witnessed another student cheating on the State Test, they chose to remain silent. Zariah stated her silence was prompted by her desire to avoid all the "drama and stuff," or the additional problems she felt telling on her classmate would bring. The cheater in Zariah's class was likely to be successful in his attempt to artificially inflate his math scores if he used a calculator for his computations. Regardless, Zariah was willing to let her classmate cheat unhindered rather than deal with the repercussions of being thought of as a tattletale. Nichols and Berliner (2007) argue that "undue emphasis on tests as the sole measure of students' and teachers worth put them in morally complex dilemmas where 'cheating' is viewed as a viable, if not morally acceptable, option" (p. 45). In keeping with Dweck and Leggett's (1988) claims, cheating may be a logical outgrowth of students' desire to avoid negative judgments of their competence. The above transcripts speak to the impact of emphasizing high-stakes testing in schools on students.

When asked to provide her perspectives on cheating in school, Monét quickly launched into a description of her personal code of academic integrity.

Monét: Well, I think it's wrong, *depending* on what it is. Like if it's a race with your friends, and it's all about fun and everything, then cheating, running a little ahead, skipping, *that* kind of cheating, that's different. But if it was a test, like the State Test, it's really bad because no State Test books are the same. So say their question number five is different and you need help on the question five, so you look at them and they got B but your answer is C and then you put B because you didn't know that they had a different sheet, and then you're like Ahhh! (Monét draws in her breath sharply.) And then you die!

Krista: So what if it was just a classwork assignment? [And] you're doing the same paper as somebody else?

Monét: Well, if it was a test, that'd be kind of bad, but if it was just a packet for morning work, then I'd be like, "Who cares?"

Researchers suggest that the more children focus on getting good grades, the more apt they are to cheat, even if the students believe cheating is wrong personally (Anderman, Griesinger, & Westerfield, 1998; Milton, Pollio, & Eison, 1986). Nichols and Berliner (2007) argue that cheating on tests is not only common, but, from their perspective, it is a logical consequence of high stakes testing pressures.

Monét's hierarchy for circumstances that "really" constituted cheating suggests she has learned high-stakes tests are more important than routine classroom activities.

And yet, her main objection to cheating on the State Test related to her awareness that the test booklets differed from one student to the next. From her perspective, cheating on the State Test was wrong in part because Monét deemed the practice was an inefficient exercise: it wouldn't lead to getting more answers right. This perspective is reflective of Monét's performance goal orientation. A student with a learning goal orientation might object to cheating because it would mean the cheater hadn't actually learned the material being assessed. When testing becomes embedded in school culture, students perceive that "getting it," or learning, is dictated by test performance.

For the children I spoke to, the focus on "getting it" reflects the pressures they feel to demonstrate their abilities in particular ways. The pressure the students felt to show they were "getting it," specifically in high-stakes testing situations, factored into the students' adoption of performance goal orientations. From a sociocultural perspective, in contrast, learning is a co-construction of meaning, mitigated by various cultural and contextual factors. From this point of view, "getting it" is understood somewhat differently than the view expressed by the students themselves. They focused not on learning as a lifelong practice, but in more instrumental terms. "Getting it" for the young people I spoke meant getting answers right.

Arguably, the students' performance goal orientations have been molded by their experiences with accountability policies in school, policies that have been shaped by long dominant views of education. Giroux explains the foundation from which such views originated: "The discourse of behavioristic learning psychology, which focuses on the

best way to learn a given body of knowledge, and...the logic of scientific management, as reflected in the back-to-basics movement, competency testing and systems management schemes” (Giroux, 1988b, p. 2).

Dweck and Leggett (1988) described the differences between the two orientations as follows: “Thus, in challenging achievement situations, helpless children might be pursuing the performance goal of *proving* their ability, whereas the mastery-oriented children might be pursuing the learning goal of *improving* their ability” (p. 259). For Monét, the idea of cheating on a test was wrong partially because it might lead to her abilities being documented as lower than they actually were. Cheating on classroom tasks, on the other hand, was of less concern, because she knew there were no differences between her assignment and those of her peers. Cheating off of a successful student’s assignment would likely result in a correct answer, and the more answers Monét got correct, the higher she believed her abilities would be judged. The fact that Monét seemed to care little about cheating on classwork isn’t surprising given the enormous amount of instructional time schools spend testing students (see for example, Jones, et al., 1999; K. McMahon, 2009).

The pressures on the children to do their best and indeed, to prove they had actually gotten “it” were very real and inescapable realities for the children I interviewed. The annual State Test was a particular concern because their performance goal orientations made them fearful of having negative judgments of their competence shared publicly. Lola’s descriptions are especially illustrative of State Test pressure on my

participants, so I have chosen to quote at length from one of my interviews with her. In the segment below, Lola has been asked to describe her teacher.

Lola: She loves education and she wants us to get the answers right. So she tells us to push ourselves to get this right, 'cause on the State Test if we don't get all the answers right, then they'll just make our grade lower.

Krista: How did you find that out? That if you don't do the test right, you'll have your grade lowered?

Lola: Mmm?

Krista: [Clarifying.] Who told you that?

Lola: My this year's teacher and my last year's teacher.

Krista: I see. Okay.

Lola: 'Cause we also had a State Test last year.

Krista: How do you feel about the State Test?

Lola: I feel [felt] very nervous.

Krista: Yeah?

Lola: Yeah, and it takes three *days*!

Krista: It takes three days? What was it like going through that last year?

Lola: (Frowns.) It wasn't that fun.

Krista: It wasn't that fun?

Lola: Because, well, it *was* 'cause at the end we got to take naps. And one time I actually did fall asleep. (Grins.)

Krista: (Smiles.) Oh, wow. Were you nervous when you took the test?

Lola: Yes! I was kind of shaking.

Krista: Why were you shaking?

Lola: ‘Cause I was really nervous! And I didn’t *want* to really take the test, but I had to, ‘cause I knew the time was gonna come.

Lola reported feeling “really nervous” and stated that she found herself “shaking” when it came time to sit for the test she had no desire to take, and no power to refuse. She was resigned to what she knew was inevitable: “I didn’t *want* to really take the test, but I had to ‘cause I knew the time was gonna come.” Whether Lola’s teacher actually communicated to students that their grades would be lowered as a result of poor test performance (or not) is immaterial. School-wide testing emphasis, pressure to perform and even children’s perceptions that their grades could be negatively affected by poor test performance may have encouraged kids to cheat, and inspired anxiety about the State Test in particular.

Few would argue that students’ knowledge should not be assessed regularly and graded (see Kohn, 2004, for an interesting rebuttal). Routine assessment helps teacher plan for their students’ instruction, and it gives teachers an indication of what students do well and where they need further assistance. In fact, assessment is an essential classroom activity (William, 2010). The uses and applications of classroom assessments and high stakes tests are different, however. Teachers use classroom assessments as tools for

guiding instruction. The pressure from high stakes tests comes from the difference in the way these tests are used.

Standardized high stakes tests are purported to assess children equally, and are typically cast as objective, reliable tools for determining the degree to which schools are successfully educating students. These tests are meant to provide the public with an indication of the relative quality of individual schools. The problem, as William points out is the fact that, “differences in the quality of schooling account for only a small portion of the variation in student outcomes” (William, 2010, p. 109). The challenge is that the very things that make schools differ from one another (e.g. resources, location, students’ demographics like SES, home language, parental education levels, and etc) account for a *significant* amount of the variation in test scores (Firestone, Schorr, & Monfils, 2004). And in fact, achievement tests are designed this way so as to preserve the spread among scores (Popham, 2004).

Teachers use students’ performance on classroom assessments to help students and parents see where mistakes were made, or to showcase students’ achievement in some area. High-stakes, standardized tests might be considered informative in the sense that they provide a one-time indication of how individual students performed relative to their peers, but the tests generally offer very little as instructional tools. Teachers and parents receive summary reports of students’ scores, but they do not usually receive information of the types or errors made. More emphasis is placed on the results of high stakes tests than on classroom assessments, which means the pressure to perform well on

these tests is greater for schools, teachers and students. Kohn (2004) describes the national emphasis on standardized testing as “swelled and mutated, like a creature in one of those old horror movies, to the point that it now threatens to swallow our schools whole” (p. 55). An emphasis on testing, particularly high-stakes testing, was a routine aspect of the school day for the children I interviewed.

In describing what took place during a typical school day, Tashala mentioned at dismissal time some children walked to the school bus, others waited to be picked up by their parents, while a third group had to remain afterschool. She stated this group was sent to a classroom for “Math State Test” tutoring. Tashala’s observation isn’t unusual. Lola mentioned her class routinely practiced for the annual State Test. She explained why she thought they practiced for the annual test: “We’re asked to do them [practice tests] because when it’s time for the State Test we have to, we have to um, we absolutely *have* to practice for the State Test because they are really expecting us to answer these questions right.”

An emphasis on test preparation at the classroom and school level seem to have influenced Tashala and Lola’s belief that test scores reflect the degree to which they are “getting it” in school. Children with high scores, ostensibly, will hold higher opinions of themselves as learners than will children who score poorly. The problem is that research demonstrates an emphasis on testing in school leads to less academically challenging lessons. In reporting the findings of a four year longitudinal study of elementary math

and reading instruction at schools before and during the NCLB years, Valli, et al. (2008) stated,

In addition to teaching practices being characterized by test preparation, time sampling data across all study schools indicate that, with the increased press of test accountability, lessons became less cognitively demanding. (p. 128)

This means children who test well may feel they are more capable academically, or even smart, but the reality may be that their high scores reflect test preparation. Scores may rise, but actual educational growth declines.

Researchers have documented that high-stakes testing pressures can create situations in which school personnel feel motivated to provide additional help to students whose scores suggest they're meeting or close to meeting proficiency benchmarks at the expense of those children who are much further behind academically (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2010). The result of the pressures of high-stakes tests in this case, is to focus on preparing more children just below proficiency standards to increase their scores. Any increases for these so-called "bubble" kids (Booher-Jennings, 2005) would be seen as evidence the schools were better educating their students. The problem of course, is that too often, focusing on "bubble kids" comes at the expense of students whose test scores are even further below, as this quote from a classroom teacher illustrates:

I guess there's supposed to be remediation for anything below 55 percent, but you have to figure out who to focus on in class, and I definitely focus more on the

bubble kids....It would take two years for her to pass the test, so there's really no hope for her...I feel we might as well focus on the ones that there's hope for (Booher-Jennings, 2006, p. 761)

The accountability movement clearly reflects traditional views of education. Since high-stakes tests frequently come with sanctions ranging from publication of scores in the local newspaper, to increasing or lowering teachers' salaries in districts with pay-for-performance agreements, and even reassignment of school staff and administrators, it is in the best interest of schools to raise students' scores. Scholars have pointed out some of the problems created by these sanctions and the pressures they create. It has been argued that an emphasis on testing has led to repercussions such as narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, dishonesty, and teacher attrition (Berliner, 2008; Harlen & Deakin-Crick, 2002).

When federal education policies focus on accountability measures, standards, and "scientific" approaches to instruction, the policies inevitably filter down to individual states, school districts, principals, teachers and eventually, the students themselves. The emphasis on accountability for my participants is twofold: they experience pressure to prove they are "getting it," at school. The pressure to get it influenced the students' adoption of performance goal orientations. The result for the students is the maintenance of the unfortunate belief that learning (the "it" they spoke at length about) is largely a practice of filling in the right circles on answer sheets.

Answered Questions, Good Grades, and Solving Problems Like the Teacher:

How Students Know They're "Getting It"

The students felt "getting it," was their primary job in school, and they tended to define success in learning in terms of being recognized for providing the right answers to questions. This tendency is in keeping with the students' performance goal orientations. They wanted to demonstrate their abilities in order to gain positive judgments of their competency in a given area. The following excerpt from Baller is a good example of this. He believed that achievements in math pointed to his development as a learner. He observed, "At my multiplication facts, when I learned my fours, and then when I learned my sixes, and on and on? It felt good. It felt like I was growing." Rihanna also saw memorization as evidence she was "getting it." Referring to her teacher's tests of students' knowledge of US states and capitals she declared, "I'm improving, because mostly now, I'm getting only one wrong...sometimes, I'll get *all* of it right."

Although Baller and Rihanna both mention growth and development in their responses, these remarks are not indicators of a learning goal orientation. Both children were motivated to memorize their facts in order to demonstrate their competency in math and geography, respectively. In other conversations, Baller and Rihanna expressed their desire to avoid certain subjects that they found "hard" in school.

Powers looked towards more tangible evidence to confirm he was "getting it" at school than did Rihanna and Baller. His transcripts reflect his performance goal orientation. Powers experienced school as a type of swapping exercise between himself

and his teachers. He described his teachers' role in this exchange, noting, "They give us some prize[s]. They gots [give] a harmonica toy, and some kinda whistle, and a new eraser, if we answer a question right." The exchange of correct answers for toys and treats was fine with Powers as he went on, "And I answered five questions right!"

Monét's concept of herself as a learner, similar to Powers, was linked to her perception of her ability to answer questions correctly.

And [I] really like science and I'm good at math, *depending* on what it is. I'm good at multiplication, but I'm bad at 'Guess My Rule'... it's like, you have to say what was the rule for that [number] and then "please continue finishing this table". And then write, [and] answer some questions about it. And I'm kind of bad at that, but I'm good at it at the same time, 'cause I know everything but then I don't know everything! (She giggles.) You know: I *know* it, but I don't know it!

Arguably, Monét's response, "I know it, but I don't know it" reflects her performance goal orientation. Although she doesn't say so explicitly in this excerpt, it can be inferred that she would prefer to avoid challenging activities like the "Guess My Rule" task in order to avoid negative competency judgments.

The preceding excerpts suggest that students' schooling experiences led them to define learning in very narrow ways. "Getting it" for these students was connected to answering questions correctly and receiving recognition for doing so. Tashala wanted to avoid participating in math class because she perceived she never finished her

assignments as quickly as her classmates did. This is in keeping with a performance goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Tashala remarked,

Because I love to read, and I love to write, but math? I don't like to add, subtract, divide or multiply, so reading is more easier for me. Well, I do have to think, but I really don't always have to think *hard*. Because it's [reading is] just easy for me. But math I have to think hard, because it's so hard for me and I can't get it and I can't get it on time.

Tashala stated she doesn't like math as much as she enjoys reading and writing because math requires her to "think hard." She was concerned that she was simply not as capable in math because she struggled to "get it on time." Tashala was unable to see that her thinking "hard" is a key to her success in math. She believed reading is something she is better suited to since it is "easier," and she doesn't "always have to think *hard*." In short, Tashala perceived math as a subject one either "gets" or doesn't.

Lola and DJ seemed to view the number scores they received on assignments and report cards as symbols of their academic abilities. DJ commented, for instance, "I am a, three's, two's and one's person." When I asked DJ to clarify what he meant he told me, "Well, first, one means failing, two [means] needs improvement, three, [means you're] on [grade] level, [and] four is passing." He said he knew he was a "three's two's and one's person" because those numbers appeared on his report cards. Lola also used relied on her report card numbers to tell her how she was performing academically. She described the difference between the scores as follows:

If you get a three you're very good and you're close to getting a four, if you get a two, you're very close to getting a three. If you're getting [a] one, that means that you failed. If you got a four that means you did a very good job and I think it means that you are also getting ready to go on to fourth grade.

Lola's transcript shows she didn't have a clear understanding of the differences between the various report card scores, she just knew she wanted to avoid a "one" because that number "means that you failed." She also believed that receiving by "a four on our progress reports." was evidence her teacher liked her. Both DJ and Lola's comments reflect a tendency among some participants to base their sense of themselves as learners off teachers' evaluations.

The transcripts above highlight the ways in which, good grades, answered questions, and finding school "easy" were viewed by the children as evidence they were "getting it" in school. The students did not speak about *how* they developed in particular subjects as evidence they were getting it. Their focus was on the end result. A good grade confirmed their competency. Bad grades or difficulty answering questions were seen as external confirmations that they were lacking in internal intellectual abilities. The transcripts above reflect performance goal orientations in a number of ways. The students' I spoke with wanted to avoid being seen as lacking in ability. They saw correct answers to questions as evidence that they were "getting it," or learning, and they wanted to answer as many questions right as possible.

Extra Help, Missing Class, Peer Rejection, and the “Special” Label:

How *Not* “Getting It” is Experienced

The excerpt that follows came from an interview with DJ in which he spoke about math instruction in his fourth grade classroom. In his description, DJ highlights a unique form of evidence he used to demonstrate his competency: solving problems using his teacher’s preferred methods.

DJ: Me, and a girl in my class named Maria, we’re the only person [people] that really does not do long division ‘cause we don’t get the way she does it.

Krista: And have you asked her to give you some help with long division?

DJ: No, ‘cause every time when she would show it to us...I still don’t get it!

Krista: So she only knows kind of one way to show you how to do it? (Nods.)

And that’s the way you don’t understand?

DJ: (Nodding.) Mm, hmm. And you would have to do a landmark number [and] start with that number. And it’s so hard, I don’t get it! And she says when you do short division you have to get the exact answer, but I don’t know what she means by that. ‘Cause she would make the division sign and then she would put a little line down [by] whatever number it’s like, five hundred divided by ten. And then ten would probably go into five hundred, [but] I don’t know. (Shrugs.)

In DJ’s case, confusion with attempts to solve problems using the algorithm his teacher modeled convinced him that he didn’t “get” long division. He saw himself as unsuccessful because he believed he couldn’t solve the problems using the strategy his

teacher demonstrated in class. For DJ, solutions in math needed to be obtained using the “right” approach, and he thought the right approach was the one his teacher favored. “Getting it,” in this case, was as much a matter of getting the correct answer as it was doing things the same way as the teacher. This is in line with DJ’s performance goal orientation. Learning long division, or developing mathematical reasoning was of less concern to DJ than avoiding the potential negative judgments about his abilities. The fact that DJ could solve long division problems using a traditional algorithm was of little comfort. He couldn’t consider himself successful if he hadn’t mastered his teacher’s preferred method. DJ was frustrated by his failure to “do long division...the way she does it.”

DJ’s transcript also demonstrates the fact that his performance goal orientation prevents him, in essence, from working harder to add a new problem solving strategy to his repertoire. He states he hasn’t asked his teacher for assistance. DJ avoids making the effort to ask for help because a performance goal orientation leads children to equate extra effort with a lack of ability (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

As is clear from the transcripts in this first sub theme, “getting it” impacted the students’ perspectives about themselves as learners. Success in school, or “getting it” was marked by experiences of receiving praise, treats, good grades, and other tangible evidence of success. The students’ attention to “getting it” at school mirrors their performance goal orientations. Children rarely credited their daily effort in school, or their modest progress in a particular area as evidence for “getting it,” or learning. Baller’s

comment about his awareness of his own growth in math is unique in this regard, but even in his case, memorization of his timetables was the proof he claimed for having learned.

In this final sub theme, I present the ways in which the children experienced *not* “getting it” at school. The children used the phrase “getting it” as a synonym for learning. The students’ preoccupation with getting comes as a result of the pressures they experienced in school to get it. The children pointed to instrumental and traditional measures for learning, such as grades and answering their teachers’ questions as proof they were getting it.

For those children who struggled, getting extra help was mentioned as the chief way not “getting it” was avoided. Zariah did not believe she was “getting it” in school and felt she needed extra help. The problem, from her perspective, was that asking for assistance made her feel her teacher was challenging her.

Zariah: I ask for help, but my teacher says [to] wait ‘til everyone’s finished [be]cause you can go over it. And then she says to go on to the next problem, but I don’t understand the whole *page* sometimes.

Krista: Does that help you? [The strategy of moving on to another problem.]

Zariah: No.

Krista: No? Have you ever tried to tell her that doesn’t help?

Zariah: Yes.

Krista: What [did] she do?

Zariah: She said, “What do you want me to do about it?”

Krista: What did you say?

Zariah: I don’t know, I didn’t say anything.

Krista: How’d it make you feel when she asked you that, “What do you want me to do about it?”

Zariah: I don’t know. [Looks down at the table.]

To be fair, most of the students believed that their teachers were more approachable than Zariah’s teacher was, although DJ mentioned he faced a similar dilemma as the following excerpt suggests:

DJ: Like we would go on the rug, she would explain it to us, but sometimes when she explained it to us, I don’t really get it. And then, sometimes she will say, “Are you, [were] you listening?” And then, sometimes she doesn’t really repeat it. Like, she would just ignore me.

In contrast to Zariah and DJ, Rhino attributed not “getting it” to the fact that she was bussed to a school filled with students who were simply smarter than she was.

I’m falling behind in my class [because] my school is advanced. So, kindergarten is first grade, first grade is second grade, third grade is fourth grade, fourth grade is fifth grade and fifth grade is sixth grade for them. So, I’m basically in the fifth grade, but in a fourth grade. So, they give challenging work to the kids and I sometimes don’t get it. And she [another teacher] has to help me with it.

Rhino seemed to believe the extra help she received was proof she was less academically capable than her peers. As Weiner explains, “if others succeed while you fail, then again failure is more likely to be attributed to the self” (Weiner, 2000). Not “getting it” convinced Rhino she was “falling behind” her “advanced” peers, rather than that her learning styles and strengths were different from those emphasized in the suburban school she attended.

In describing what he did not enjoy about school, Baller stated, “Math is sort of difficult for me. I have problems with it. But at least I can get help.” It struck me as I occasionally assisted Baller with homework in between interviews that he seemed to feel there was little he could do to make math less difficult. In Baller’s case, the extra help he received from his teachers made math as a subject, bearable, but it less clear whether he thought teachers’ help made math easier for him. During a small group interview, Rihanna described a source for extra help that was not often mentioned by the students.

Rihanna: My teacher just tell[s] us to ask three different people that listened, and then they don’t know, then you can talk to the, tell, [or] ask my teacher. And then she would tell you [the answer]!

Krista: And is that helpful, going to ask a friend?

Rihanna: (Nodding.) Mm, hmm. Mm, hmm.

DJ: That’s cool!

The excerpts above emphasize the role of extra help as an antidote, of sorts, to not “getting it.” It would be easy to presume that extra help is automatically beneficial to

struggling students. However, it is possible that extra help may actually harm students in the long run. In an article on describing the ways in which stereotypes often convey attribution information in the classroom Reyna (2000) posits,

We tend to feel sorry for the girl failing the math exam because of perceived low aptitude, or the Asian kid we think is not successful in sporting events because of low coordination of physical prowess. Thus, we may offer them social support or engage in other prosocial activities to help them, like giving the girl special tutoring in math or letting the Asian kid play on a less challenging position on the team (Graham, 1991; Harvey, 1986). Although this initial assistance may benefit the child in the short term...this attributional pattern will ultimately reduce a teacher's confidence in the student, and the student's confidence in him or herself. (p. 99)

The students tended to agree that extra helped them avoid not “getting it,” but a tension existed for them as well. Regardless of the source of assistance, many students felt receiving extra help came at a price. This was particularly true when not getting it required students to be taken out of their regular classrooms.

In interviews with Baller, Joy, Rihanna and Rhino, they explained that they left their classrooms each day to visit other teachers for help in reading, math, and other academic subjects. Sade, in addition, spent her entire school day in a self-contained classroom. Although much attention has been given to inclusionary services for students with learning difficulties, many schools still use what is commonly referred to as a “pull-

out” model. Rather than bringing help to the children in the regular classroom setting, students are taken from the classroom for individual or small group assistance. Two well-known studies found that children generally preferred being pulled out of class rather than being helped in the classroom alongside their peers. Klinger, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen and Forgan (1998) and Vlachou, Didaskalou and Argyrakouli (2006), being pulled-out of class was less preferable to students than being helped in their classroom. In the first study, fourth, fifth and sixth graders who had spent at least one year in classrooms using inclusion and pull-out service delivery models were interviewed. Over half the participants favored the pull-out model. In the second study, conducted by Vlachou et al., nearly two thirds of the second, third, fourth and fifth graders interviewed preferred the pull-out model.

In contrast to the studies above, the young people I spoke viewed pull-outs as generally unpleasant daily school experiences. A story Rhino told during our first interview speaks to her aggravation at being pulled out of the regular class for extra assistance.

Rhino: Sometimes, when we’re doing something fun, it stinks to get [taken] out of the class.

Krista: Was there a time that happened, where you want[ed] to stay?

Rhino: Yeah.

Krista: Tell me about it.

Rhino: Like, I wanted to stay at the computer lab to type up my poem; well, [actually] this is with another teacher. Her name is Ms. Fencer and she had to take me out, but I didn't want to go. So I got mad. I wouldn't talk for the rest of the day, so [because] that's how I am. When I get mad, I don't talk to *nobody*!

Further complicating matters, even when Rhino was actually in her classroom, and not being pulled away for help in reading and math, Rhino felt she singled out for extra attention, as this next excerpt makes clear.

And then there's a teacher in my room [and] the only reason that she's in there is 'cause of Seth. And she helps him, but he gives a lottta attitude to her, so after she's not at him, she comes over to me. And then I say, "I don't need any help" and she just says, "Well, you're gonna get help." [But] then I don't need help so then she confuses me even more. And then she goes, "Oh, I'm sorry." I just feel like pulling her head off, but I can't!

Here, Rhino expresses the aggravations she felt in receiving "unhelpful" assistance from an aide Rhino knew was assigned to work with another student in her class. Rhino found the classroom aide's help confusing. Although she tried to refuse the aide's offer of assistance, Rhino was told help was coming whether she wanted it or not. She was especially exasperated because she felt she was forced into accepting extra the aide's "confus[ing]" help because she didn't put forward the same kind of resistance that exempted her classmate Seth: "he gives a lot a attitude to her, so...she comes over to me." Regardless of the setting, students perceived extra help was a mixed blessing.

The potential for peer rejection was perhaps the single greatest disadvantage to getting help as part of “getting it” in school. Rihanna, like several other children I spoke to, believed the students at her school knew about one another’s academic levels and that this situation was less than ideal, particularly for students who struggled like she did.

Rihanna: I think it should be secret, but... [Shrugs.]

Krista: Why?

Rihanna: Well, because they don’t need to know, only the teachers need to know something like that. Because I think they wouldn’t like it if they were like in my grade and they didn’t really know how to spell easy words, like “super” or something like that. But [Especially if] they’re really smart at other subjects. I think it would hurt their feelings if someone actually bullied them: ‘Oh, you don’t even know those words? They’re so easy! Everybody knows how to spell that!’

Sade, the only participant in this study who was educated outside a general education classroom understood the downside of not “getting it” quite well. Her best friend was another girl who shared the same “special” label as Sade, as she explains in this excerpt.

Sade: I only have *one* friend.

Krista: Okay, tell me about her or him.

Sade: Her. She’s friendly. Sometimes, well, this is a secret...

Krista: This...what?

Sade: (Pause.) Sometimes she, you know, *pees* on herself sometimes.

Krista: I see. Uh, huh.

Sade: And, I'm okay with that. She can tell me anything she wants.

Krista: So you have one really close friend at school?

Sade: Yup.

Krista: How do you feel about having one close friend?

Sade: Not cool.

Sade's "special" status seemed to follow her from school to the Learning Center context as well. During my spring interviews, I saw that Sade seemed to have few friends. I had thought her difficulty making friends had to do with to her occasionally eccentric behavior: Sade often secreted snails that she'd picked up from around The Learning Center and carried them around inside her coat pockets, for example. A stray comment from her mother during the recruitment period, supported by several conversations with Sade, suggested that her peers' knowledge of her status as a special education student might have been at least partially to blame for Sade's lack of friends.

Stewart (2009) acknowledges the tension that exists between providing children with the best educational environment even when those environments impede on children's opportunities for successful peer relationships.

Though it is necessary for the physical well being of students with severe disabilities to receive specific and intense instruction and services from trained professionals in a self-contained room, the physical isolation from typical peers

sends and underlying message to those peers that ‘those people’ are not part of the mainstream and thus exclusion is not only necessary, but desired. (p. 130)

Although Sade’s “disability” did not appear to be severe, by virtue of the fact that her educational environment was outside the norm, she most likely experiencing school and peer relationships in the way Stewart described. For Sade, not “getting it” meant she attended school in a more restrictive learning environment, and this environment isolated Sade socially as much as it did physically. Sade’s status as a special needs student meant she experienced school in a very different way than the other participants in this study.

As this excerpt from Joy demonstrates, being perceived as not “getting it” often served as a confirmation of “special” status.

Joy: Well, they always call on me, because they think that I don’t get it because I’m the lowest reader in the class. I’m a different level than them, [the other students] but they [the teachers] think I don’t get everything, because I read little baby books. I don’t like chapter books because they’re too long. So they [the teachers] think I’m on a low level so they always call on me. So that makes me special because they always call on *me*.

What is particularly interesting is the fact that when I asked Joy, “what do your teachers do to make you feel special at school?” my use of the word “special” was meant to convey a feeling of importance or value. I used a variation of this same question with nearly every child I interviewed, yet none interpreted “special” in the same way Joy did.

Her understanding of the word was unique and that difference in interpretation provided me with a significant insight into how she was experiencing school.

It is clear from Joy's transcript that class discussions that might otherwise have helped Joy gain understanding and engage in thoughtful conversations about books, had instead become vehicles in which her low self-concept, "I'm the lowest reader in the class" was made public: "they think I'm on a low level because they always call on me." Joy was hopeful that her struggle with reading did not matter as much to her classmates as it seemed to matter to her teachers. She stated, "I think they [students] know what people's levels are, but I don't think they care." However, research shows that students who struggle academically are generally reported as having fewer friends, and their teachers often report these students have greater difficulty with social relationships (Bryan, Burnstein, & Ergul, 2004; Luciano & Savage, 2007).

When children view their teachers as unhelpful, or feel that something internal is the reason they're not "getting it," success in school begins to seem impossible. I return to comments from DJ to highlight the ways his perception of his fifth grade teacher's help impacted how he saw himself as a learner and affected his perspectives on problem solving in math. Although DJ felt he wasn't "getting" long division in the fourth grade, when I spoke to him again in the fall he had a different outlook. Certainly, personal growth, and regular practice over the summer could have played a role in his success, but DJ attributed his new confidence in long division to the help he received from his new teacher, Miss Gee.

DJ: It's ooh, almost half of the class knows it, and [smiles] I'm one of the half of the class that doesn't know it.

Krista: So when you ask her for help?

DJ: She helps me.

Krista: What's different?

DJ: When I asked *her* for help, I feel like, 'couraged, that I can really do it, like encouraged that I can do it. Or however you say it.

Krista: Yeah, that's perfect. You feel encouraged. What does she say, or what does she do that encourages you?

DJ: Like she says that it's okay if you get it wrong, because of she makes mistakes too. So, if I get it wrong than it's not my fault or hers. It's what she would say.

Krista: And that's encouraging to you.

DJ: Yeah. (Whispers into microphone.) But I still don't do it long division.

As this example shows, DJ had come full circle in his approach to solving division problems. The difference from DJ's perspective was Miss Gee's affirmation that mistakes were part of the learning process. As a result, DJ felt "couraged" to take risks in class. What is most striking is DJ's final comment in which he asserts, "But I still don't do it long division." In other words, despite his teacher's encouraging words, and in-class coaching, DJ had decided it was perfectly acceptable to solve division problems using whatever method suited him, even if it wasn't the approach his teacher used. His earlier

transcript showed DJ felt learning corresponded to doing things in the same way as his teacher. DJ's experiences suggest the transformative potential teachers may play in helping children understand that "getting it" is as much about the *processes* involved in learning as uncovering the "right" answers. DJ's transcript about Miss Gee suggests he may be shifting somewhat in his orientation toward learning. He expresses that he felt less afraid to make mistakes and demonstrates a willingness to persist in problem solving that wasn't evident in his first transcript. There are at least hints that his experiences with Miss Gee have fostered the beginnings of a learning goal orientation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the ways in which "getting it" was an important aspect of the schooling experiences for the children I interviewed. Throughout this findings discussion, I have suggested my participants' preoccupation with "getting it" was influenced by their performance goal orientations to learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Interview transcripts support the notion that students experienced accountability policies, particularly in the form of high-stakes testing requirements, as external pressures to demonstrate they were getting "it." These pressures affected the forms of evidence the students cited for determining on their own whether they were, in fact, "getting it." The children viewed correct answers, report card grades and other such indicators as proof for their intellectual and academic abilities, and perhaps even, capacities.

When students did not “get it,” they perceived their schooling experiences were different from those peers who were “getting it.” Participants believed the assistance they received in school to help them catch up with their peers as a mixed blessing. Although some children were, most likely, being offered extra assistance in order to improve their chances for academic success, from the students’ perspective, help was not always beneficial. Most notably, the children feared that getting extra help resulted in being labeled, as Joy understood it, “special” in comparison to their “normal” classmates. Transcripts also suggest that the forms assistance took were also problematic from the children’s perspective. Being pulled out from their classrooms was singled out as an added source of frustration for students, while in-class help was viewed as a necessary, but stressful intervention. Students’ excerpts demonstrate that not “getting it” was a complicated challenge for students, and their stories attest to the difficulties associated with providing appropriate and sensitive assistance to all learners.

In Chapter 5, the findings focus shifts from students’ experiences with learning to their interpersonal experiences with peers. Interview and focus group transcript excerpts as well as drawings are presented that highlight the degree to which peer relationships impacted children’s schooling experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Different Sides Each Day”: Students’ Experiences with Peers

Throughout our conversations, the participants of this study were eager to talk about their experiences with peers, and this chapter centers on the stories students told about those experiences. The data show that participants considered peer relationships as valuable, but complicated aspects of the schooling experience. Within the theme of “different sides each day” (a phrase Joy used to explain her frustration with her closest friends), are three sub strands. The first strand deals with school settings used by students to develop and maintain peer relationships. The second sub theme focuses on students’ stories about bullying and teasing episodes. The final strand explores how students and adults responded to negative peer incidents. In addition to interview transcripts, I refer to drawings some of the children completed in an effort to literally illustrate the importance of this theme.

With the amount of attention placed on improving student learning, teachers face an inordinate amount of pressure to focus exclusively on instruction while paying scant attention to the social and emotional needs of students and the social contexts of learning. Narrowly focusing on instruction may be understandable given the pressures teachers face to raise students’ scores, but this focus may not, ultimately, be in the best interests of students. Chesley (p. 696) described the situation in this way:

Too many educators fail to consider the connection between the social and the academic. All too often the impact of the school's climate, the demeanor of the teachers, and the attitude of the community toward the students are ignored, resulting in achievement lags, disenfranchisement, and worse yet—school dropout. (p. 186)

A Multilayered View of Schools

Before moving on to discuss the sub themes of this chapter (students' experiences with peers), I first summarize Gordon et al.'s (1999) concept of multilayered schools, because I refer to their concept throughout this, and, to a lesser extent, subsequent findings chapters. Gordon and colleague stated that students entering secondary schools are positioned and position themselves in various ways as they work towards becoming “professional” pupils. They defined professional pupils as those students who had learned how their school (as a system) worked, as well as how to “work the system,” so to speak within their school.

Through their research, Gordon et al. (1999) hypothesized that there are three school layers: official, informal and physical. They contend that while these layers are distinct in many ways, they are at the same time “intertwined” with one another. The official school includes teachers' lessons, formal hierarchies, curriculum and systems for discipline and classroom management. The informal school incorporates informal hierarchies, social interaction, and the interpretation and application of rules. The

physical school refers to spatiality and embodiment. In the next three sections I explain each layer identified by the researchers, clarify the differences between the layers, and address the ways in which the present study relates to Gordon et al.'s (1999) multilayered school concept.

Learning the Rules of the Dance: Navigating The Official School

In a follow up to their original study, Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma (2000) used the concept of a dance as a metaphor for understanding both the interplay and the distinct characteristics of these layers. The official school can be thought of as the rules of a traditional dance, the patterns inherent in dance steps as well as the roles played by of the master of ceremonies and the dancers themselves. The master of ceremonies applies the appropriate rules in different situations, understanding how to orchestrate the dancers' movement when a ballroom is unusually shaped, or a particularly large group of dancers takes the floor, and most importantly, makes certain that the orchestra is properly tuned and prepared to play (Gordon, et al., 2000). The dancers know how to appropriately act and even dress their parts. The master of ceremonies is not required to send notes to the dancers reminding them not to wear a square dancing costume if the dance will feature the fox trot, waltz or quick-step, for example.

As the metaphor of applies to the school context, teachers are cast as the masters of ceremony and students, of course, are the dancers. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) argue that to become professionalized,

students need first to learn appropriate behavior in and outside the classroom.

They have to learn the basic features of the pedagogic process, the hierarchical relations within the school, and the possibilities and spaces for, as well as the limitations of, student agency. (p. 72)

The professionalization process is seen in the official school as students find ways to adapt to the implicit hierarchical relationships that exist between themselves and their teachers. Not only do professional students learn where they fit in terms of hierarchical relationships with adults, they are taught (implicitly or explicitly) about difference. These lessons may be in reference to differences between the school students attend and a rival school, and differences between students in specific grade levels, social classes, school subjects, genders, and other areas (Lahelma & Gordon, 1997). In the official school, students are positioned differently in terms of their academic achievement and grades. This is usually a positioning done by the school (or the classroom teacher) *to* the student.

In Step or Improvisation: Dancing in the Informal School

As the informal school is explained by the dance metaphor, it is within this layer that the students are orchestrating the dance to a larger degree. Traditional movements and steps grow diverse, and the dancers increasingly improvise, create entirely new dances, or mock the traditional forms they've already mastered. In addition, dancers pay a great deal more attention to one another. There are both wallflowers, and those dancers who are prevented from taking the floor. The students are dancing together continually

searching for others dancing to the same beat. As they experience the dance together, “whether they are dancing according to the rules, using official, informal or altered steps, they may at any moment be feeling energetic or tired, happy or sad, excited or frustrated, in tune with others or lonely and in discord” (Gordon, et al., 2000, p. 101).

Gordon and colleagues (1999) argued that informal interactions, conversations, and “everyday cultures” (p. 694) comprised the informal school layer. In the informal school students largely position themselves, “using their social skills, friendships, verbal aptitude, or physical prowess” (p. 698). Difference and continuity in the informal school are evident in the jockeying students undertake to establish the social order. Over time, students acquire (or are assigned) differing social positions as, for example, loners, class clowns, or extroverts. Forming friendship groups and determining individual roles and memberships are both important aspects of students’ work in the informal school. Gordon and colleagues argued that most students seek to define boundaries between themselves and teachers, and indeed, between the official and the informal school. However, teachers play a role in the informal school to the degree that they (implicitly or not) condone the social status assigned to particular students.

Settings for the Dance: Movement and The Physical School

Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) extend their metaphor of the dance to the physical school. They argue, “different steps are practised in different places” (p. 136). Additionally, dancers may feel compelled to take the center of the floor while others

merely watch from the sidelines. Schools are first and foremost, physical structures. The physical building, in fact, is a student's first encounter with the school setting. Gordon et al. (1999) state that the physical layer of schools is evident in terms of a) space; b) time c) movement; d) voice, and e) "the curriculum of the body" (p. 702). I will now briefly touch on each of these factors.

In regard to space Gordon et al. (1999) maintain that spatial freedom for students is limited to the amount of personal space claimed by individuals, and the locations students and their friends drift to during break periods. The researchers argued that in the process of entering a school, students are inevitably informed as to the acceptable (and unacceptable) ways for using or occupying particular spaces. Professional students learn to adjust to these written and unwritten rules. Just as students are inculcated as to proper uses of the physical spaces within their schools, they must also learn how time is organized within their schools. With regard to time in the physical school, Gordon et al. suggest that as students become professionalized, they learn their time is not truly their own. Dismissal bells, length and frequency of break periods, and the amount of time devoted to lessons are typically outside students' control.

Gordon and colleagues (1999) also theorize that schools are structured in such a way that movement and organization are deeply connected. As they become professionalized, students learn that there are appropriate times to walk in the hallway, or sit at a table with friends. Similarly, students will be taught when they are expected to stop moving altogether (Delamont & Galton, 1986). Students may resist constraints on

their movement, time, and authorized versus unauthorized spaces. Often times, students' resistance incorporates voice, the fourth element of the physical layer of schools. Gordon et al. note that voice is unique because it "travels across space and time" as well as "across the official, the informal and the physical school" (p. 702).

The final element described by Gordon and colleagues (1999) is the curriculum of the body. Students' bodies are a platform for self-expression. Students often adopt particular styles of dress in an effort to communicate individual and group identity in the informal school. This would be seen in cheerleaders wearing their uniforms to school to showcase their identity as cheerleaders, for instance. Students' bodies are also locations for teachers to exert control, as Gordon et al. explain: "movement from break time to lessons, from informal to official school (or space) involves a *symbolic undressing* of bodies: [for example] caps, chewing gum and sweets are to be left outside" (p. 702). Teachers may tell their students to "turn around" or to "sit up" during a lesson. Students must comply with these demands, or face the risk of punishment for noncompliance.

Just as a dance is experienced as a function of multiple layers, so to do students experience school. It is possible to tease out distinctions among the layers Gordon et al. (1999) highlight, and doing so reveals more about the complex institution we call "school." Throughout this chapter and subsequent findings chapters I will refer to Gordon et al.'s notion of the multilayered school, demonstrating the links between their conceptualization and the ways in which the young participants in this study were similarly facing, and occasionally resisting, their own processes of professionalization in

school. In the next section of this chapter, I present the first sub strand of the overarching theme, students' experiences with peers.

Settings for Peer Relationships

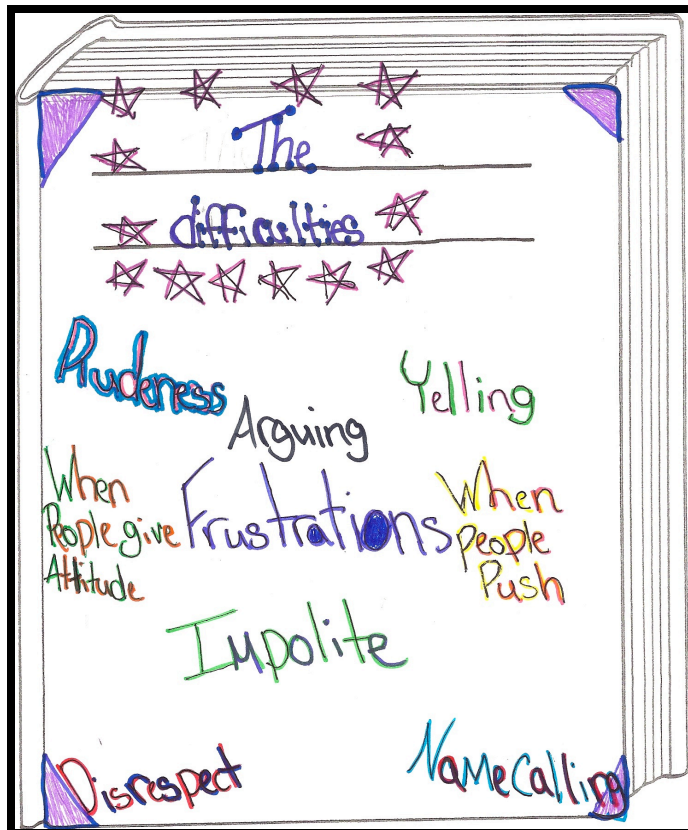
Relationships with peers surfaced as a primary way many non-academic aspects of school were experienced for my participants. Rarely did the students talk about lunchtime, for example, without describing how relationships with their peers figured into the school lunch experience. In this sub theme, I explore the ways the students appropriated the school site as a setting for forming and maintaining peer relationships. In doing so, I suggest the importance of peer relationships in the students' lives, situating this discussion in literature on children's friendships. For the sake of clarity, I use sub headings in this section to delineate the different settings described by the students. The settings are: the classroom, recess and lunch periods, and bus rides.

The Classroom

When I asked Tashala to draw a book cover representing her schooling experiences she quickly informed me she wanted to put her lettering skills to work instead. "I want to write fancy," she explained. Using gel pens in a variety of colors, Tashala stated that the words she added to her cover represented aspects of what made up "the difficulties" she felt she'd experienced in school.

When I asked Tashala why she had titled her mock book “The difficulties” her response was immediate: “Because at school there are a lot of things that are difficult for me. And a lot of things I just can’t take anymore.” As she completed her drawing, Tashala told a story about a classmate’s practical joke as an example of the kinds of things that took place at school that she could no longer tolerate.

Figure 1. Tashala’s book cover drawing.



Tashala: When I was about to sit down, he pulled the chair [out].

Krista: What happened?

Tashala: [I] Fell.

Krista: You did? Did you hurt yourself?

Tashala: I don't know. I wasn't paying attention to me being hurt; I was paying attention to me possibly beating him up!

Tashala's drawing highlights an important aspect of Gordon, et al.'s (2000) research: namely, that children's sense of school is primarily formed in the informal school context (p. 135). When I asked Tashala to describe what happened at school that she couldn't take any longer, her immediate response was to share an unpleasant incident with a classmate. She did not mention confusion over classwork, or classroom rules, she spoke about peer interactions. From Tashala's perspective, the cumulative effect of incidents orchestrated in the informal school context combined to make school a setting for "The difficulties."

In general, participants had mixed feelings about the routine of going to school, but there was one aspect of schooling that most children spoke about with pleasure: the chance to see their friends. The school site offered students daily opportunities to interact with children that many of the students didn't otherwise see. The classroom served as an obvious, but difficult, location for maintaining those friendships. Many of the children felt interacting with peers was challenging in the classroom. Socializing with friends in

the classroom was possible and highly desirable, but doing so could get kids into trouble as far as my participants were concerned.

Lola stated, for example, that she loved talking to with friends at school. In the quote below, however, she describes how being seated next to a good friend was difficult, since their close physical proximity often resulted in the two girls getting into trouble for socializing. Lola commented:

It's hard, because I have a friend who sits next to me and I talk to her, [and] she talks to me. And [then] I get really upset because I get in trouble and then my friend gets in trouble, so that's the hardest thing in fourth grade.

Like Lola, DJ also felt that the classroom was a tempting setting for communicating with his friends. In the following excerpt DJ describes the tension he experienced in wanting to share with friends in the informal school (Gordon, et al., 1999) while lessons were taking place in the official school.

DJ: It's hard. It's *hard*. (Giggling.) It's kinda of hard because of when we're on the rug, and then somethin' in my mind just pops up! But I just get on this idea, and then I would want to share it with somebody else. Like I have a DSI, do you know that is?

Krista: Is it the? [I mime playing a handheld gaming system by pressing imaginary buttons with my thumbs.]

DJ: (Grins.) Yeah! It's one you can take pictures with it. (Portion of transcript deleted.) And I would just get so excited 'cause I just got that [game system]

Saturday so I would share it with somebody, and I just can't help from sharing it.

And sometimes people would talk to me and whatever the teacher saying is not really interesting. So, I would just [want to] talk to somebody else.

The students Gordon and colleagues (2000) interviewed undertook a range of “Inappropriate” activities (from teachers’ perspectives) in response to their frustration over being required to sit still for long periods, including drawing, daydreaming, sharpening pencils and, of course, talking to friends (pp. 175-176).

In contrast to DJ and Lola, Tashala was not as eager to spend class time talking to her peers. Over the course of this study, Tashala shared her belief that her teachers thought she was a troublemaker. She cited previous detentions and a school suspension as evidence of her troublemaker status. Tashala felt her classmates took advantage of her reputation by blaming her for their own misdeeds. When I asked Tashala to describe what she felt was important about school, she spoke at length about an experience that had made her feel respected by her classmates.

There was this whole day that I felt lucky because everybody was respecting me.

Everybody was just being *nice* to everybody. It was in September and it was the second week of school, and everybody started to learn things about each other and started to make new friends and stuff. I made a lot of new friends that day. At morning meeting, everybody had to say something about themselves [and] to tell people about themselves. When I was sharing by accident I said a wrong word.

[But] then everybody, instead of laughing, they just didn't say anything, and then

I corrected myself. After[wards] at lunch, what happened was somebody in the class was doing something wrong and then [at] first, they were about to blame me, because they said, “She did it!” But then that’s when I just looked at the person and then the person said, “I mean...*I* did it.” So that’s the day that I felt respected.

Although peer relationships remain relatively unseen in the official school these transcripts reflect Gordon et al.’s (1999), claim that these relationships are of central importance within the informal school. Relationships with their peers were important to the children partly because the tenor of those relations could impact the entire school day. Tashala stated she felt respected because she felt her classmates’ actions that day were unusual. First, they let her verbal miscue slide by without laughing at her, which meant Tashala could correct her mistake without feeling embarrassed. Second, a guilty student admitted culpability for a wrongdoing that would otherwise have been attributed to her. Tashala stated this latter incident occurred without her feeling the need to argue or protest her innocence, “I just looked at the person.” The two specific events she described were sufficient to make her feel “lucky” and respected by her peers for “the whole day.” It was both the respectful communication with peers and the novelty of her peers’ thoughtfulness that made this incident particularly memorable for Tashala.

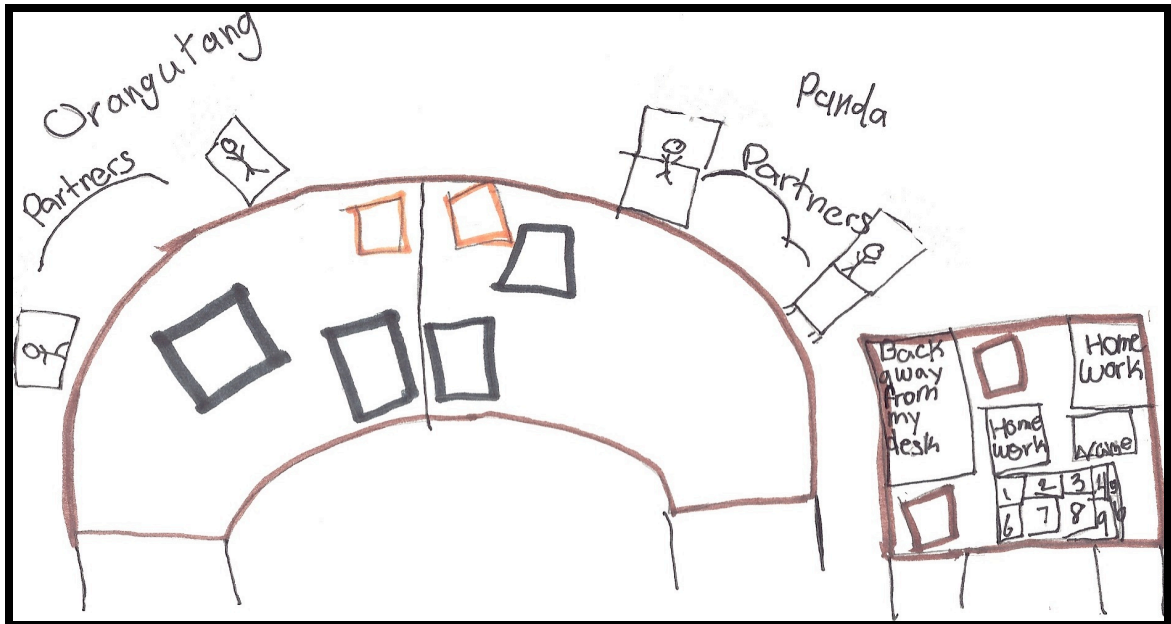
The challenges of maintaining peer relationships in the classroom environment can also be explored by analyzing Lola’s first drawing and the text of the interview transcript completed as she drew. Lola created a picture (see Figure 2) of the table she and her friend worked at in order to complete a writing project together. Spread around

the semi-circular table are sketches of papers and books. A sharp line divides the table into two separate sections. Lola's sketch features two teams of writers sitting at the same table. As she drew, Lola explained that her picture showed a day when she and her friend Collette were nearing completion of a nonfiction book about Pandas the two girls were writing.

Working alongside another pair of writers was problematic for Lola's writing partner, and Lola's description of this situation is an example of how the classroom context, from students' perspectives, can put a strain on peer relations as Lola's excerpt shows.

Lola: (An aside.) Sometimes I use pencil first when I draw because I make mistakes. There was an argument that Bethany and Collette [had]. She was really over here (Lola erases and then corrects the placement of the stick figure for Collette in her drawing.), Bethany was over here, (points to the figure on the left beneath the word "Orangutang") and I'm over here (points to the figure on the right beneath the word "Panda"). They had an argument because she was Bethany was picking up their [stuff] and putting her work on top of her [Collette's] work. So she [Collette] didn't like [it], and she got really upset and the teacher was right here. (Points to white space behind the teacher's desk.) This is her desk. (Points to the desk.) And that's her desk and she [the teacher] has a sign saying, "Back away from my desk."

Figure 2. Lola's school drawing.



The dividing line Lola drew across the table serves to showcase the metaphoric distance between the two teams of writers. Lola went on to explain that Collette wasn't the only student who was frustrated by Bethany: "There are some people that do not like her. *I* like her, it's just that she likes to be rude to other people. Well, she's not really rude, it's just that she likes to annoy people." If Lola's assessment of Bethany's standing in the classroom was correct, "some people...do not like her," Bethany may be vulnerable in terms of her position within the informal school.

Gordon and colleagues (1999) argued that socially vulnerable students (shy or lonely children, for example), "are without the security brought by friends who are able to offer help during tight spots, and they do not always find a partner during group work"

(p. 696). Not having a partner is a problem for students in the informal and physical school realms. In the official school, teachers may tell students to work cooperatively in teams. The teacher may make be explicit in the direction to work with a partner, but students, working according to the complex codes that govern the informal school, carry out the decisions about who gets to work with whom.

The excerpts above illustrate how some of my participants experienced interactions with their peers in the classroom setting. Lola and DJ generally enjoyed being seated next to friends in class but their enjoyment was tempered by the understanding that proximity to friends could bring trouble. Tashala's excerpt highlights the positive impact on students when teachers choose to allocate class time in order to help students' develop better peer relationship skills.

Recess and Lunch

Based on common sense notions of schooling and research findings (e.g., Blachford, Creeser, & Mooney, 1990; N. King, 1987), it is hardly surprising that the majority of the participants in this study enjoyed break periods like recess and lunch. Recess and lunch were the portions of the school day that students told me they looked forward to most. Tommy spoke at length about the "intense" foursquare games he and his classmates enjoyed, and he explained how he looked forward to continuing those games each recess. DJ stated he liked recess because he and his friends got to play outside on "a spinney thing" where "girls' hair comes up" and "sometimes the boys fall." Joy was

somewhat elusive in her description of what made recess enjoyable. When I asked what she liked best about recess she stated, “I don’t know. I just like it.” Sade’s reason for liking recess came from her daily recess agenda: “I play wit’ my friends.”

Baller said he liked recess so much he wanted to ask his teacher if recess periods could bookend math instruction: “If we could have recess for a half an hour, and then go back in the classroom, and then do math for twenty minutes, and then go back outside for a half hour until school’s over. That would be cool!” One of the main reasons Baller and the other students I spoke with felt more recess would be a good idea was that these periods gave the children a relatively unhindered chance to eat snacks, play, and socialize without a great deal of adult supervision. His book cover picture (see Figure 3) highlights the importance the children placed on recess as a setting for peer relationships. Although several things that Baller enjoyed about his school appear on the cover to his book, “The Amazing School,” he chose to color only two of those drawings. He did so despite the fact that I brought the picture to a follow up interview and told him on both occasions that he could spend as much time as he wanted to finish his illustration. It is possible that he simply didn’t want to color anything else, but his enthusiasm for drawing, and particularly for getting to doodle with my gel pens, leads me to believe that Baller felt his picture was finished as it is.

The two drawings Baller chose to color are of a lacrosse stick (a favorite “new” sport) and a picture of Baller and his friends playing basketball together. In fact, Baller told me he picked his pseudonym based on his status as a “B-baller” at school, or as a kid

who loved to play basketball. He stated that he and his friends liked to “play soccer, basketball, football, and lots of other stuff.” Baller’s list of activities he and his friends enjoyed is focused around sports. Gordon and colleagues suggest that boys use their skill in sports to help establish their place in the hierarchies that undergird the informal school culture (Gordon, et al., 1999). If Baller wasn’t good at sports, or didn’t enjoy them, it is doubtful that he would have felt his school was quite so “amazing.”

Figure 3. Baller’s book cover drawing.



Recess and lunch periods were breaks in the predictable school day schedule that most of the children appreciated. Alyssa was unique because she generally didn't like recess. She felt there wasn't very much to do outside, and she didn't like the board games that were available for her to play with either.

Alyssa: (Sighs.) Always soccer and football. There's nothing really the girls can do. All they usually do is sit down. That's all they do.

Krista: What do you when you sit down?

Alyssa: I just put my head down.

Krista: There aren't any other games you can play at recess time?

Alyssa: No. There's like Monopoly, but Monopoly's not my game. I don't like it.

Unlike Alyssa, Tashala would have welcomed the return of recess to her school schedule. Tashala's school did not permit recess for children at her grade level. According to Tashala, she had to wait until lunch for her free time with peers. She explained, "We don't have recess. It's only the little kids. Baby kids [and] kindergarten, they go outside. But I don't do that in third grade. When you hit first grade you don't do that." Although Tashala was the only student I spoke to who was no longer given recess, her situation is growing increasingly more common. Despite research pointing to the cognitive and social benefits of recess periods, (Gratz, 2000; NAECS/SDE, 2001; Pellegrini, 1997), break periods like recess are being reduced or eliminated altogether in the name of greater school accountability (Gratz, 2000; Newman & Brody, 1996; Ramsburg, 1998).

Using recess and lunch periods as opportunities to catch up with peers was important to most of the students I spoke to, but for Kiyyah, the pursuit of time with friends seemed to be all encompassing. In hindsight, I believe I was very fortunate to speak with Kiyyah at all. She cheerfully assented to participate in the study, but after the recruitment period ended and I began scheduling interviews, she canceled appointments on several occasions. She told me she just wanted to “hang out” with her closest friend at the Learning Center. As a result, I was able to sit down with her just once, on a day when her friend was busy with participation in a spelling contest. In this excerpt, Kiyyah explains how recess provided time for establishing friendships with other fifth grade girls at her school.

Kiyyah: Well, I sit with my friends, we talk, we play kickball at recess if we have time, and then we made a new group called the DKW.

K: Tell me about the DKW.

Kiyyah: It’s basically a group if you know how to jerk, it’s like this new dance or whatever [that] people made up, *and* if you have skinny jeans.

K: Okay, so if you have a pair of skinny jeans and you know how to jerk, then you can be in DKW?

Kiyyah: Yeah.

K: Do other people want to be in?

Kiyyah: Yes.

K: Do you think they’re going to get in?

Kiyyah: No!

K: Why not?

Kiyyah: Because they said they're not gonna add any more people 'cause there's too much. And they don't know how to jerk.

K: Are you glad you're in the group?

Kiyyah: Yeah.

K: Why?

K: 'Cause basically it's all my friends and stuff.

Gordon and colleagues (1999) observed that, "the social life of girls can be more difficult without friends; it is not surprising that a great deal of girls' energy is spent forming and maintaining friendships" (p. 696). In Kiyyah's case, gaining acceptance into the DKW group helped ensure she would have greater access to positive peer relationships during the school year. According to some scholars, peer group status can affect aspects of the schooling experience that friendships, or dyadic relations, do not. These aspects include students' feelings of belonging, opportunities for play, academic achievement, and sense of interpersonal confidence (Kutnik & Kington, 2005; Ladd, 1990).

Kiyyah's membership in the DKW group was important as a source for friendship and as a meaningful aspect of the experience of school. The fact that DKW members were required to own (and presumably wear) skinny jeans can be seen as part of the girls' processes of constructing femininity and as an attempt to use clothing to identify group

membership (Gordon, et al., 2000, p. 168). The DKW girls increased the exclusivity (and hence the desirability) of their group by limiting group's membership, because the kinds of social groups that matter most to young people are those with distinct hierarchies (Morrow, 2001). Kiyyah said she knew other girls wanted to be in the DKW group, but existing group members wanted to keep the group from growing too large, thus preventing other "qualified" students from inclusion later on.

The exclusivity of the group kept Kiyyah from sharing with me what the DKW acronym stood for. She may have felt that revealing the group's name would have been disrespectful to her fellow members since I was first and foremost an adult. Bingham (2001) states, "[W]hen I enter the public sphere, I need someone or some thing, that will mirror back to me an affirming sense of who I am" (p. 34). The DKW group served to reflect back to Kiyyah her individual social status and her group membership. These identities are important because they help Kiyyah establish her place within the social order of the informal school (Gordon, et al., 1999).

Lunch periods that might have provided Tashala with an opportunity to develop friendships were instead spent being "in charge" of a small group of her peers. From Tashala's perspective, the name given to a social group is of particular significance.

Tashala: Well, the people in my group, I don't make the name up, they make the name up. They called it "Reservation Girls." I don't know what is it, but that's what they made. Everybody came up with that. It's all girls. One person wanted,

“Princesses All Day,” but the rest of them said, “No, that’s looks too girly-girlish.” So they went Omega something.

Krista: Was it “Revelation Girls?”

Tashala: Yeah! Revelation Girls, but I don’t understand it, but I wasn’t in the group, because the teacher said all the people who are in charge have to go away and just the others guess together as a group to think of the name. Yeah, if I was there, it would be a better name, but I wasn’t so....yeah.

Krista: So, is your job then at lunch as the leader to make sure kids behave at lunch?

Tashala: (Nods.) It’s only like my group I have to watch. I don’t watch the others’ group[s], but I’m a leader because I’m the third oldest. They only took couple of the three oldest kids, because they think that oldest kids are responsible.

Tashala was convinced that if she had been allowed to participate in the naming of their lunch group, “it would [have been] a better name.” The importance of the name is as clear to the other girls in the group as it is to Tashala. The princess name suggestion was rejected for fear the choice was “too girly-girlish.” These names are important because they help to communicate the group’s identity within the social structure of the informal school. Group identities such as the “DKW,” and “Revelation Girls” help to solidify steady social groupings. These groupings also link individual students’ locations on the social maps of the informal school (Gordon, et al., 1999, p. 695).

The School Bus

The settings for stories of positive peer relations varied among my participants. For some children, riding the school bus each day was an opportunity to converse with their peers prior to the start of the school day. DJ stated he spent most of his bus ride playing with another student's cell phone. Riding the bus enabled DJ to contact peers off the bus, via instant messaging, in addition to speaking with the young lady who let him use her phone each morning. Their daily interactions also helped DJ take his mind off of one unpleasant aspect of the trip as the following transcript demonstrates.

My friend that [the student who] has it, she's in fifth grade. But it's [the ride] not that good because one of these kids who's in first grade swears a little bit *too* much every day, and it's just not a good thing.

Although DJ was annoyed by the antics of the first grader riding his bus that he described as foul-mouthed, DJ nevertheless found his morning commute improved by the opportunity to play with his friend's phone.

DJ: Well, I flip my friend's Sidekick most of the time. You know what a Sidekick is, right?

Krista: The telephone? [Short portion of transcript deleted.]

DJ: Yeah. ([Laughs.] And I go on my instant message sometimes, if she lets me.

Like DJ, the daily bus ride was an opportunity for Monét to spend time with her peers. In Monét's case, she believed that her participation in an inter-district bussing

program was instrumental in the development and maintenance of her most significant friendship, as the following excerpt shows.

Monét: Well, Rikki she's one of my closest friends and I think one way that happened is because we spend basically the bulk of our time together. Because in the morning [on the bus ride], and we're also in the same class, so it's kind of like we spend all day together. And so, I bet you if she didn't take the bus, we might not be as good of friends. 'Cause like for instance, when we had this fifth grade dance kind of thing to introduce us to the middle school...she called us to ask if we could her drive her there with us, because we were gonna go out. And so, I bet you we wouldn't be friends like that if that wasn't like that....

Krista: Other than just being around her on the bus, what makes her your best friend or a close friend?

Monét: Well, she's really nice. And she'll stand up for me if somebody's doing something bad, but she's not over protective, she's not *always* there? We know when to give each other space, we know when to ask what's wrong, and we know when you're, [when] they're, "Bleh!" Like [so] mad that you need to back away and just give them some space. We kind of know each other like that. And we've had a lot of sleepovers and stuff.

Monét's transcript highlights the ways in which school is often a central location for young people to interact with each other, form friendships, and connect with their peers. Having moved to the local area from a large Midwestern city, friendship was one

of Monét's main concerns at the start of the school year. Although boarding the school bus before seven in the morning each day wasn't a beloved school experience, Monét recognized that her daily bus rides promoted and helped nurture her friendship with Rikki. The relationship was important to Monét, because she believed she and Rikki understood each other, respecting each other's need for "space," time alone, or in silence. Gordon et al. (2000) suggest that students must learn the rules for social interactions as well as how peers relate to one another in a physical sense: sensitive observation of spatial demarcations and limits is important for students when interacting with others" (p. 160).

Positive peer relations were one of the "favorite" aspects of the school experience for the young people I spoke with. Non-academic periods such as recess and lunch provided the students with a chance to spend time socializing and connecting with other children who shared common interests. The children also managed to find time for peer relations during class time, but doing so came with the risk of getting into trouble. Regardless of the setting, the students appreciated the fact that school provided them with an opportunity each day to see, socialize and spend time with children their own age. In the next section, I present the students' stories of negative peer interactions.

Friendly Fire: Teasing and Bullying Episodes

Prior to conducting any interviews, I anticipated that at least some of the students would want to speak about their friends or peers at school, and many of them chose to do

so. I was unprepared, however, for the volume of stories that centered on unpleasant, negative, and borderline abusive relations with classmates. It seemed that the children talked more about negative peer relations than they did about positive ones. It is possible that the students were simply more interested in sharing a “sad” story with a sympathetic listener, however, research shows that in-school bullying is a common experience for children (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Interview transcripts demonstrate that nearly all the young people I spoke with had experiences with negative peer relationships. Tommy was the only student I spoke with who never spoke about having been teased at school. I have chosen to include stories that reflect a range of perceived injustices that reflect the peer relationships that caused my participants pain.

Bullying, according to scholars, can be physical or psychological. The psychological forms of bullying include verbal teasing (Shariff, 2008). When I spoke with the children about teasing and bullying, the children tended to use those words interchangeably. Although playful teasing or gentle ribbing from peer to peer is often a sign of friendship and respect, my participants distinguished this from negative forms of teasing. Researchers have suggested that children are better able to distinguish between real and pretend teasing than are adults (Doll, Song, & Siemers, 2004; Pellegrini & Bartinin, 2001)

Monét certainly felt she was able to tell when her friends’ teasing was good-natured and when it was mean spirited. She explained the differences during a small group interview.

[I know] Because [of] the way they say it...the way they said it, and like, for instance, my friend might say, “You’re so annoying...just kidding!” Like you *know* she’s just kidding, and then she’ll laugh about it, so it’s like obviously. But if she’s like, “You’re so annoying! I hate you. Just get away from me!” It gets kind of obvious. It kind of depends.

Zariah, also believed she understood the differences between real conflict between friends and when those conflicts were manufactured as a form of play. She observed, “My friends fight outside in the park, but they’re just playing.” Zariah felt sure she could tell when her girlfriends’ fights were pretend. In a similar fashion Gordon et al. (2000) suggest that among boys, behaviors that might ordinarily seem aggressive (pushing and slapping) are often used as a socially acceptable means of making contact with one another (p. 121).

The children I spoke to, therefore, believed they knew the difference between “real” teasing and bullying and the kinds of “playful” teasing and mock fighting I often observed at TLC. When participants spoke about teasing and bullying in interviews, they never used those phrases in reference to playful teasing. Some form of harm, whether directed at the student or someone else was always associated with the teasing episodes the children discussed.

Snake eloquently described the significance of these negative encounters for children. His description points to the lasting impact of teasing episodes on young people.

My class is a class like, they like to tease people and stuff, If you do something you didn't want to do, and [a] person saw it, they would tell other people, and then everybody would tell each other and stuff, and it would get around the school. And then it's like being marked for life. Like if you cut yourself, you keep it; [it] stays there for life, until you like move to a different school and start over.

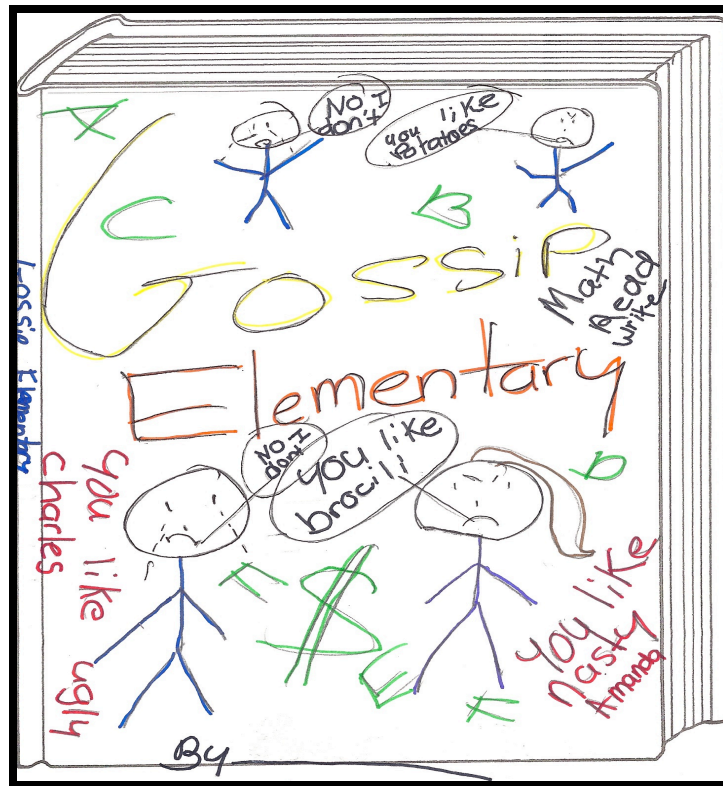
DJ's daily interactions with a classmate he called "Gossip Girl" bothered him to the degree that he made Gossip Girl the subject of his book cover drawing Centered in the upper half of his book cover, DJ scrawled the words "Gossip Elementary" in large yellow and orange letters. Surrounding the title are various school words and symbols: letter grades, school subjects, and a dollar sign. Beneath the title are two figures: a boy with tears streaming down his face and a girl with an angry scowl (distinguished from the boys on the cover by her top-knot ponytail). The girl's eyebrows are furrowed in scowl as she hurls her insult: "You like broccoli." The tearful reply of the victim appears above his head "No I dont." To the side of these two figures are phrases written in red: "You like ugly Charlie" and "You like nasty Amanda." Above these figures are two other boys. In this smaller scene, one boy is being teased by another boy. The aggressor in this scene taunts his victim's love of potatoes as the other boy tearfully protests.

As he worked on his drawing, DJ stated the taunts and names he used were just for the drawing, and not connected to actual incidents.

DJ: Well, not all of these [are] like the dialogues that I hear. They're not real, like, that was happening at my school, but it's *related* to them, 'cause of, this has

people gossiping, like this person's [speech bubble] say, "You like broccoli." And this one's crying, saying, "No, I don't." This one said, "You like potatoes." This one's saying, "No, I don't." This one, this person's say, it's somebody saying, "You like nasty Amanda." [Points to the other figure.] "You like ugly Charles." So, they're basically gossiping and they're at school.

Figure 4. DJ's book cover drawing



Despite the manufactured nature of the dialogues between the figures drawn on his cover, DJ make it clear that the book cover reflects his “real” school experiences.

“Not all of these [are] like the dialogues I hear. They’re not real...but it’s *related* to them.”

Since the students I spoke to were children of color, many of whom were bussed to suburban (and predominantly white) schools, it is disappointing, but perhaps not surprising, that a handful of students experienced teasing episodes that had racist overtones. Gordon and colleagues (2000) suggest that for students, “difference is potentially dangerous” (p. 131). The students they interviewed recounted many instances in which teasing students from ethnic minority groups took place. During our first interview, Rhino told me a story about being subjected to a racial epithet at school. As I interviewed other students, I used the incident she described as a means of broaching the subject of race-based taunts with other participants, however, specific incidents were mentioned by Rhino, Rihanna and Zariah only.

According to Rhino, relations between the children who lived in her school’s neighborhood and the children bussed in from the city were strained. Rhino’s skin color, and that of her friends, was at the heart of the incident she describes in the excerpt below.

Rhino: My best friend is just like me. When she gets mad, she can’t see the person she gets mad at, except she’s more violent. (Giggles.) She got into a fight with this boy, his name is Nathan, he lives over there. (Points.) And he was like, “Oh, um every time the Downtown kids come over they always want to mess with us Suburban kids.” And then he called us the N-word, and he never got in trouble for it. And then she got mad at the principal and him, the principal for not getting

him in trouble, and him for calling them that. But I didn't mind him calling us that. It's the truth, we *are* Black, but you know, he doesn't have to call us that word. But, like the other one, we made up this puzzle. It's says if they call us the B-word, we say, "That really means a female dog, which dogs bark, and bark comes from a tree and tree is, a tree is nature. And nature is beautiful, so you're basically calling us beautiful!" (K: Laughs.) Yeah, pretty much!

In the book, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, Essed (1991) offers a clear description for the reasons the use of the "N-word" is offensive to Black men and women.

U.S. [men and] women see racist slurs in a structural context. From that point of view nigger is not a word but a concept representing the history of oppression of Blacks. *Name calling then is intimidation* because Whites use, as a symbolic weapon, the body of cultural and structural oppression. (Essed, 1991, p. 256, emphasis added)

Although Rhino's White classmates were not adults, they had already learned that language is not neutral and certain words are imbued with powerful messages (e.g. Bordieu, 1991). Hicks Townes (2009) observed that whenever she asked her female, low-income, and working class participants about issues of race, "instances of verbal abuse punctuated their stories" (p. 56). Although the students I spoke to were younger than the high school sophomores and juniors Hicks Townes interviewed, the age difference in no way shielded my participants from this kind of teasing.

Rihanna was also bussed daily from her city neighborhood to one that was suburban, affluent, and overwhelmingly White. While Rihanna generally had favorable things to say about her school (she told me she “loved” her school), her affection for her school did not extend to all her peers. In the following excerpt, Rihanna responds to a question about whether she had ever experienced a race-based teasing episode.

Rihanna: I never had a situation like that, but sometimes I *feel* like it.

Krista: How do you mean?

Rihanna: Like,

Krista: Tell me what you mean?

Rihanna: Like, sometimes these girls, you know Fran? There’s like these, whole group of girls, and they just talk, and, because me and Dennis like each other, like as *friends*? You know? And every time, we, we like to hang out and even if we’re boy and girl, that doesn’t mean that we *like* each other. And then they say, “Rihanna, why do you always hang out with Dennis?” I just say, “Because I just wanna hang out. He’s just my friend.” And, “Is that a problem?” And she says, “No!” It’s not a problem, it’s that they just always want to be curious every time I’m with Dennis. [Rihanna begins to imitate Fran.] “Dennis, Dennis, Oh, Dennis! Why are you always playin’ with Rihanna? Oh, Dennis? Rihanna? Rihanna!” Whatever, and stuff. And actually, it kind of hurts my feelings. Even if I’m not of that same color as them, they shouldn’t even be talkin’ about me. [Rihanna now changes her voice, tosses and invisible ponytail from side to side behind her head,

and raises her voice into an imitation of Fran.] And they always say, “I bet like,” and once they actually said this once? “I bet these *Black*, I bet Rihanna’s friends have girlfriends, are girlfriend and boyfriend, and they like each other.”

Krista: Wait, say that again?

Rihanna: They said, “All Rihanna’s Black friends, are always,” I mean, “I bet they have” I mean, whaddya call it? [she says this under her breath] I bet they have, yeah! I know! “I bet they have, girlfriends and boyfriends.” But lucky I’m this color, and I don’t have one. I’m too young for one. And even if they think me and Dennis are like close friends like these-, this, [Rihanna raises her index finger and middle finger at the same time touching each other.] that doesn’t mean that we are boyfriend and girlfriend. That doesn’t mean anything. That just *means* we’re friends! Plenty of my friends like, Janelle she has he, Greg. Greg is my brother’s friend? I’m Greg—I’m Dennis’s friend. Greg’s, Dennis’s friend. I’m other people’s friends! It’s not like I don’t have anybody’s friend. I [just] don’t have any boyfriends. Like, *boyfriends*?

As is clear from this excerpt, Rihanna’s classmates quickly moved from teasing her about a peer relationship they viewed as inappropriate, to stereotyping based on Rihanna’s race.

Psychological bullying like the sort Rihanna experienced is difficult for victims on a number of levels. Not only was Rihanna put in the position of advocating for her friendships with Dennis, Greg, and other boys, she had to defend a precious aspect of her identity as well, since her ethnicity and race were being used against her: “But lucky I’m

this color, and I don't have one. I'm too young for one." Contrary to Rihanna's classmates' concerns, friendships with the opposite sex are not unusual among young children, although children are often teased about such relationships (Gordon, et al., 1999; Thorne, 1993). Rihanna did attempt to explain that her relationship with Dennis was platonic. She told her classmates, "He's just my friend." Rihanna's transcript suggests that her classmate's ignored her, insinuating there was something more to her relationship with Dennis than friendship (e.g., the "Oh, Dennis, Oh, Rihanna" comments). Further, her White classmates assumed that since Rihanna had a boyfriend, *all* girls sharing Rihanna's age, ethnicity, and even neighborhood membership must also have had romantic relationships with boys. Rihanna states her classmates declared, "All Rihanna's Black friends....I bet they have, girlfriends and boyfriends."

In contrast to the race-based taunts experienced by Rhino and Rihanna, Zariah's transcripts suggest that such insults occur even in schools where the majority of the students are "minorities," or non-White students. Zariah attended a large city public school she described as being too "poor" to afford a proper cafeteria. She rode the bus to the Learning Center virtually every day, accompanied by her two younger siblings. The ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse school she attended was a place in which Zariah had to contend with peers' comments challenging her heritage. In the following excerpt, Zariah responds to a question about whether she had ever experienced kids at school teasing each other because of their skin color.

Zariah: Yes. Sometimes I would say me because they say that...because of my skin color is black, I'm not Puerto Rican. I'm not White or anything like that. But they don't know because it's in my blood. And if they can't see that, too bad for them!

Krista: So what do the kids say, when they're, when they're making those comments?

Zariah: They so, "Oh, you're not, you're not Puerto Rican because Black people aren't Puerto Rican."

Krista: Okay. And what happens when you tell them?

Zariah: And sometimes they tease me because they say my brother, my sister are really, really, light complexion from me, and they say that that's not my brother, that's not my sister, and they're lying [my brother and sister are lying], and I'm lying about that.

Krista: Oh, Zariah, how did that make you feel when they said that about your family?

Zariah: First, I felt sad, but after, I got over it, because I know that they're my brother and my sister, and nothing can change that.

Krista: But it still bothered you.

Zariah: No, because that happened to my aunt on my mother's side. She's like my color? And the rest of her brothers and sisters are different coloring. Like, my younger sister she's my aunt's that's like my skin color? *Her* sister is like my

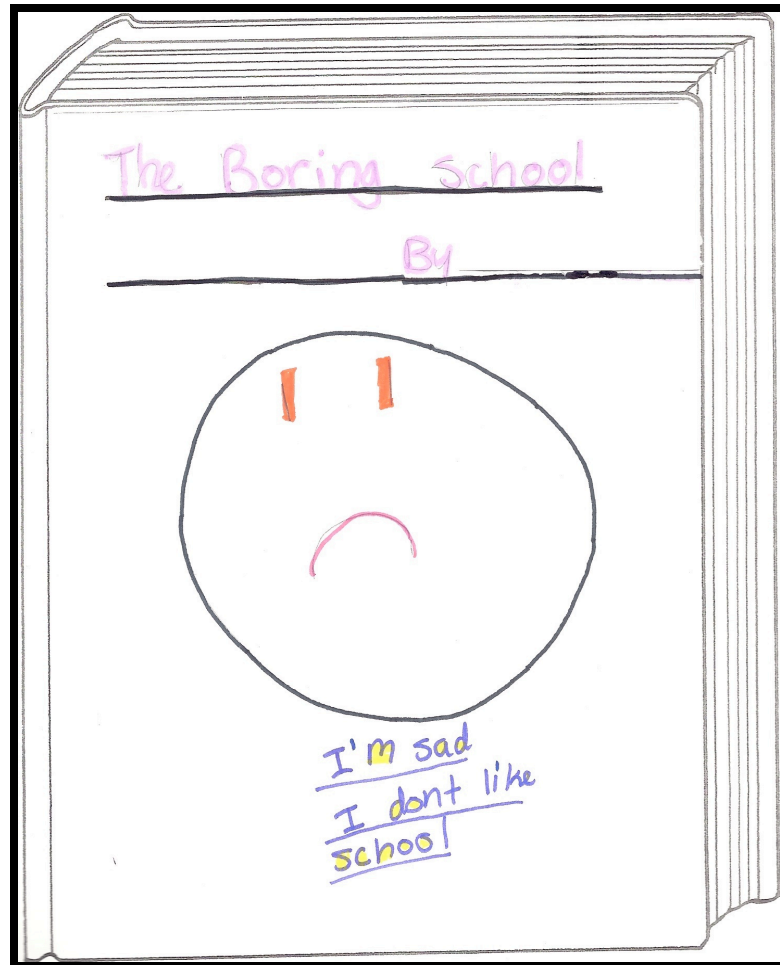
sister's skin color. And *my* brother is like *her* brother's skin color. And she's the only one like me. That's why everyone always asks when I walk around with her, whenever I go places with her, (and I'm visiting her house today too) and they say [ask] if I'm her sister, or, if I'm her daughter.

Zariah admitted that the teasing and questioning she endured from classmates made her unhappy. She stated that after the incident she described above, she "felt sad." She qualified this remark by explaining that she "got over it." Part of what helped her get over the hurt she experienced was Zariah's understanding of the myriad of skin tones within her immediate and extended family. She stated her Puerto Rican heritage was "in [her] blood," something that she felt was invisible to most of her classmates.

Of course, not all negative peer interactions centered on students' race. The illustrative quote for the overarching theme of this chapter, "Different Sides Each Day" came from remark made by Joy during one of our interviews. Dealing with the bickering between her competing peer groups exhausted Joy. Her school drawing suggests that on some level the frequency of being caught on "different sides" with friends made school less pleasant. Beneath the title, "The Boring School," is a large face with orange eyes and a pink mouth. The downturn of the mouth conveys a "sad" face. Underneath the face, Joy wrote the phrases "I'm sad" and "I dont [sic] like school." Her frustration with peer relationships at school is evident in the following excerpt:

They're nice, but sometimes they exclude people [like] when they're doing little groups, and sometimes they just be mean, it's like one day they're nice and one day they're mean. They go on different sides each day! 'Cause we get mad at

Figure 5. Joy's book cover drawing.



each other because we spilled something on each other at lunch, so they get mad and then they go on different sides of the group, because we have

different groups. Because there's a new girl at school and one is her side and one is Marti's side. So they always go against each other.

Joy was so frustrated by her peers' constant arguments each that when I asked her who she thought was *least* important in her school she replied tersely, "my friends."

Rihanna, in contrast, believed friends were a very important part of her life at school. She offered up a continuum that enabled her to categorize her relationships with peers at school. After describing an unpleasant incident with a classmate Rihanna explained where that classmate fit in her peer relationship continuum.

Rihanna: I'm not really her *friend*, but we're cool.

Krista: What's the difference between being "cool" with someone and being friends with them?

Rihanna: We have our ups and downs. Upsy-downy's.

Krista: Okay?

Rihanna: So, you wouldn't see- [Those] people are not my [the] same as friends.

Krista: So, if you were describing someone that *was* your friend, then I can assume you don't have those same ups and downs?

Rihanna: (Nods and smiles.) I *don't* have those same ups and downs.

For Rihanna, a "friend" was someone with whom she felt the relationship was consistently positive. She was "cool" with other classmates, and she characterized those relationships as having "ups and downs." In other words, if she was "cool" with someone, they occasionally got into disagreements.

I heard, unfortunately, many stories from the children that dealt with experiences of teasing and bullying at school. Zariah and Rihanna both spoke about having seen classmates choked by other students, and feeling powerless to intervene. Tashala referred to another student's in-class tirade after being pinched, and the teasing he endured for his outburst over the incident. Popular and well-liked students also admitted to having been teased. Baller told me that older students teased him when an injury limited his movements and forced him to hold his arm in an awkward position. Snake described being the target of teasing from a peer in the computer lab. In the final sub theme I address adult and student responses to negative peer interactions.

Responses to Negative Peer Interactions

Gordon et al. (2000) agree that "time spent in school generates a range of complex, diverse social situations for students (and teachers) to deal with in which powerful, varied emotions are triggered" (p. 124). As participants shared their experiences with negative peer relations, they often detailed how they themselves, and adults at school reacted to problems with peers that the children experienced. It is important to realize from the outset, that by the time participants had made the decision to ask for adults' help, the children believed they had already exhausted all the available avenues for dealing with an incident. In the next section, I profile the ways in which participants responded to bullying and teasing situations.

Students' Responses

When children took matters into their own hands, their overwhelming responses were to ignore the situation, or attempt to reconcile. I asked several of participants to explain how they survived friendships at school, and particularly in regard to recess. I encouraged each child to offer their “tips” for maintaining friendships at school. Baller claimed arguments between him and his closest friends were fairly routine occurrences, as the following interview segment shows.

Baller: [I] don't really have tips.

Krista: Okay.

Baller: I just do it and get it over with.

Krista: Give me an example, what do you mean?

Baller: Well, when I have friends, [and] we argue sometimes? I just say, “Okay.” [and] that [is] final. And then we just go “Hey!” And then the next minute we're friends again.

Baller's experienced arguing with peers as a regrettable, but expected interruption to friendships at school. He was bothered by these disagreements, and attempting to reconcile in order to maintain his relationships with his peers. For this reason he focused not on the strategies he used to resolve conflicts, but getting past those conflicts. He remarked, “I just do it and get it over with.”

Streets, much like Baller, believed that finding quick resolutions was essential to maintaining peer relationships. He argued that his solution to friends' emotional highs

and lows was the best possible response in order to prevent their relationship from becoming strained down the road.

Streets: Yeah. My friends, sometimes they get mad for nothing. Sometimes they be happy, and sometimes they have, like, “Bad Wednesdays.” And Bad Wednesdays is [when, for example] they don’t share their lunch with anybody. If anybody ask them for something, they say, “No” and stuff like that.

Krista: Tell me about a time when one of your friends got mad for no reason.

Streets: When we first came into school, he just got mad, and I don’t know why he got mad, nobody knew why that he got mad, so I just really didn’t care ‘cause he got mad for no reason.

Krista: And yet you’re still friends?

Streets: Yeah.

Krista: How did you guys fix that?

Streets: We fixed it like if I tell [told] him that, “If you get mad over something, then you can’t bring it into school, you can get mad when you have something else, like [when] you get free time.”

Streets stated he “really didn’t care” when his friend got angry. His feelings were due in part to Streets’ understanding that his friend was upset before he arrived at school and that Streets had played no role in upsetting his friend. Streets believed the key to surviving the “Bad Wednesdays” of his peer relationships was to have a strict rule that outside frustrations were kept separate from the school context. Free time periods, or

those moments in the boys' day when they wouldn't be able to interact with each other, were the only times Streets felt it made sense to hold onto feelings of anger. Streets' desire to minimize friction between himself and his friends may be because he recognizes that having friends makes school life more manageable and less chaotic (Gordon, et al., 2000, p. 111).

Students' Perceptions of Adults' Responses

Researchers suggest that teachers are better able to recognize physical bullying than psychological bullying (Boulton & Hawker, 1997). Since teachers are more comfortable identifying physical bullying teacher intervention in such cases is more likely. The problem is that physical bullying is much less common than psychological bullying (Hoover, Oliver, & Thomson, 1993). Given the "hidden" nature of much of kids' teasing, instances of psychological bullying are harder for teachers to identify, which makes intervention difficult (Doll, et al., 2004). Making matters worse, studies have shown that teachers report lower prevalence rates for bullying and teasing episodes than students (Holt & Keyes, 2004; Pervin & Turner, 1994; Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002).

When some of the students I interviewed attempted to solve peer problems on their own, they often perceived that their efforts ran afoul of the expectations of the official school (Gordon, et al., 1999). In these instances, adults took control of the situation, and the students were generally dissatisfied by the solutions to the concerns the

students had raised. My participants' transcripts also demonstrate the degree to which the "rules" for reporting peer problems were perceived by students as obstacles to justice in the informal school. Rihanna, for example, recalled what happened when she attempted to intervene on behalf of a friend who was being physically assaulted by a male student.

Rihanna: There's this boy, oh, my gosh! I still remember it. It's this boy named Javon. He used to go to my school, but he moved to the South, I think. And then he punched me, in um, on my neck. (She points to a place, just below her jaw line on the right side of her neck.) Yes, he did. It was painful, because I was trying to help this girl. He was suffocating on her...and there was actually [a] tack kind of sticking out so she could of hurted herself. So, I said that in the accident, "Javon, get off of her!" And then he starts puttin' hands on *me*! I didn't even do nuthin' too! I just pushed him back. He hurt the girl, Gennie, and then he's punching me in the neck, and it actually, I had ah- it was sore. And, actually and you can notice where he punched me. Oh, my gosh! I can remember it.

K: So, what happened?

Rihanna: It *haunted* me.

K: What happened after he punched you, what did the teacher do?

Rihanna: I had to go. It was actually at lunch and the teacher said to me that I'm better enough, and then I went to the nurse. And the nurse said that, "You're all right. Lucky he didn't really punch you that hard to hurt your lung." Um my bone, right here. (Points to her sternum.) And then the lunch lady said, "After you get

dessert, she has to go over to the principal's office." And then, Geenie, the girl who got hurt, and my friend Mahtob, who's my, on *my* side, [and] who saw the whole thing came [with us]. And then, Javon, the one who punched me, and Geenie came. So, then, all three of us, except for Mahtob, she's my [other] friend? Um, except for she [her]. I had to stay in the office for one more day [of punishment] because she [the principal] said that I should not have came in the business, because [then] I wouldn't got my thing [neckline] punched?

Rihanna believed that the adults at her school had all failed to understand the severity of Javon's physical bullying of Geenie. When she stepped in and challenged Javon first verbally and later by retaliating physically, she perceived that she had no other choice in the matter.

Rihanna stated she and her friends felt Javon alone should have been punished for the incident. Rihanna's transcript highlights the frustration she experienced when her attempt to prevent further harm to her friend resulted in her receiving punishment. Worse still, Rihanna believed her principal felt the injury she sustained during the incident was her own fault: "She said I should not have came in the business, because [then] I wouldn't got my thing [neckline] punched."

DJ described the response he observed during a situation in class involving childhood psychological sexual harassment (Shariff, 2008). His story highlights the steps that students are often required to follow in order to report problems with peers.

One of these people in my class, and in the fifth grade, called this girl a lesbian. And she wasn't crying about it, even though she has a cold heart, but she wasn't crying about it. She kept it serious, but she did tell the teacher. But I don't really think anything *really* happened though. But no! She didn't tell the teacher, she told the lunch monitor! And they couldn't really be able to do anything though. So, oh, yeah! So she *did* tell the teacher. And the teacher had to tell [the principal]. The teacher said, "Go get a paper, write it down" and she'll put it in Miss Malloy's [the principal's] mailbox.

To DJ, and the victim in the episode he recounted, calling someone a "lesbian" was offensive and worthy of some form of correction. However, from DJ's perspective, although the girl who was teased, "kept it serious," or pursued the line of appeals available to her at school, neither the cafeteria worker nor the classroom teacher directly took action. According to DJ, the teacher's response to the event was to tell the girl to write up what had happened, so that the teacher could take the girl's written report to the school principal. Clearly, DJ felt a more immediate response was warranted, because as he argued, "I don't really think anything *really* happened though."

A number of participants believed that there was simply no point in involving adults in peer problems. The students felt there was nothing adults could do to help. Snake spoke about a teasing episode that embarrassed him, but he chose not to speak to his teacher about the incident.

Snake: Well, we went to computers, and there was like, this person that sits next to me was teasing me and sending email and he emailed everyone in the class and everybody started laughing.

Krista: Do you remember what the person sent in the email?

Snake: (Pause.) Yeah.

Krista: Do you mind telling me?

Snake: He said I eat squirrels and fart out cheese.

Krista: Really? What did you do?

Snake: Nothing.

Krista: You didn't tell the teacher or anything?

Snake: No.

Krista: Why not?

Snake: I don't know. (Sniffs loudly.)

Snake admitted he did "nothing" in response to the teasing. When I inquired why he didn't inform his teacher, he replied he "didn't know." Part of his confusion may have come from the fact that, for Snake, being teased in any form was unusual. Cyber-bullying is a relatively new phenomenon (Shariff, 2008), and has been defined as any speech or language that is, "defamatory, constitutes bullying, harassment or discrimination, discloses personal information, or contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments" (Willard, 2003, p. 66). From my observations at TLC, Snake appeared to be very popular, the frequent subject of girls' crushes, and a student the other

boys at TLC wanted to be around. Popularity and attractiveness to members of the opposite sex are cited as “buffers” against peer victimization (Pellegrini & Bartinin, 2001; Pellegrini, Bartinin, & Brooks, 1999). However, Snake’s status as a “cool” kid didn’t grant him complete immunity from being teased. The relative anonymity of email may have provided Snake’s classmate with a sense of security not present in face-to-face communication.

Sade, like Snake, did not believe she had much to gain by informing her teachers she was teased. As a student in a self-contained classroom, being picked on was a routine part of her school experiences. In fact, research shows that children in remedial education and those with disabilities are more likely to be targets for bullies (Byrne, 1994; Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001). The fact that Sade was frequently teased did not mean that she became immune to these episodes. Gordon et al. (2000) suggest that students exposed to “constant, relentless teasing, suffer a great deal” (p. 132). In the segment below, Sade explains what she felt was the “hardest thing” about being a student.

Sade: Getting bullied.

Krista: Will you tell me about that?

Sade: When I first came to the school, this boy named Malik kept on bullyin’ me before Miss Dennue came.

Krista: Okay, and what would Malik do when he was bullying you?

Sade: He would call me names and stuff.

Krista: What sort of names did he call you?

Sade: The **B**-word.

Krista: Really? Did he do anything else other than calling you-?

Sade: No.

Krista: Was he the only one who was doing that?

Sade: Mm, hmm.

Krista: Did you ever tell your teacher you were getting bullied or picked on? That he was using those words? (Sade shakes her head.) No?

Sade: No!

Krista: Okay, why not?

Sade: I would just let him bully me, I don't care! But I still don't like it.

The on-going nature of the teasing Sade endured at school, as well as at TLC may have been the primary reason Sade didn't trouble herself to report teasing incidents. Although she only refers to one student's mistreatment in this excerpt, Sade spoke about being teased by classmates so often, that I offered her advice on how I had dealt with teasing as a student in school myself. My attempt at intervening on Sade's behalf reflects the traditional intervention patterns used in schools. It is argued that most schools address bullying and teasing problems by dealing with peer relationships a student at a time, but that this approach is, by itself, insufficient to produce lasting changes (Doll, 1996; Doll, et al., 2004). Long-term improvements require whole school, or at least whole classroom approaches to the problem (Doll, et al., 2004). It is important to note that Sade was the only young person I spoke to who experienced teasing on a pervasive level.

Conclusion

The transcript excerpts presented in this chapter highlight participants' desire for establishing new friendships, and maintaining existing friendships. Transcripts support Gordon et al.'s (2000) claim of the salience of peer relationships in the informal school. The school site offered several locations for the students for forming positive peer relationships. Individual students' classrooms, recess and lunch periods, and even bus rides to school served as platforms for pursuing friendships. As it became clear during interviews, however, the school site also served as a location for negative peer experiences. Many of the stories students told about their in-school experiences with peers centered on unhappy memories, particularly recalled teasing episodes. Bahktin (1981) argued that, "language is not a neutral medium" because it is "populated with the intentions of others" (p. 294). Data presented in this chapter communicate the skill with which students' interpreted their peers' intentions. Participants believed they could easily differentiate between instances of good-natured teasing that occurred among friends, and teasing episodes in which insult or embarrassment was intended. The students' stories also demonstrate that children quickly learn how certain words and phrases, for example, "lesbian," or "the N-word" can be appropriated to bring pain to others. Teasing to harm, as my participants' stories attest, is not merely a fury of words, it is about "processes of differentiation" and "the construction of power" at the peer level (Gordon, et al., 2000, p. 135).

Whether participants' experiences with peer relationships were primarily positive or negative, the children viewed peer relationships as being fraught with, as Rihanna termed them, "upsy-downy's." Despite the prevalence of friendship trouble, the children I spoke to seemed to have few strategies for managing social relationships. During interviews the children indicated that they either ignored relationship challenges and hoped situations would improve on their own, or, when difficulties arose, they did whatever they could in an attempt to bring about reconciliation. When children perceived that reconciliation wasn't possible, or in response to situations they felt were severe, participants expected adults to intervene on their behalf. When challenges with their peers arose, children often wanted their teachers to intervene, but adults' solutions to teasing and bullying episodes were not satisfying to participants.

Outside of students' family and kinship ties, relationships with peers are perhaps some of the most personal connections young children form. Consistent research findings point to the fact that socially included children experience school in fundamentally different ways than children who are excluded (Doll, et al., 2004; Osterman, 2000; Wentzel, 1998). Feelings of a lack of peer support negatively impact students' schooling experiences in a variety of ways, including their success and interest in school (Sletta, Valas, & Skaalvik, 1996; Wentzel, 1998). Although peer relationships weigh heavily in terms of their importance to students, scholars argue that, "American teachers tend not to perceive children's peer relationships as being their responsibility" (Bryan, et al., 2004, p. 49). Schools need to be mindful that children define caring

teachers as those individuals who protect them from bullying and foster classroom climates in which all students feel they belong (Doll, et al., 2004). Students who feel protected by their teachers are also more likely to be engaged in school, and demonstrate better coping skills than those who do not view their teachers as a source of security (R. M. Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994).

School communities must be persuaded that helping children develop and maintain positive peer relationships is the best interests of the students' and the school, because these relationships are a critical aspect of students sense of belonging within the school community (Osterman, 2000). Fibkins (2003) notes, for example, "we have for too long allowed teachers to continue to embrace the long-held myth that their involvement in understanding the personal sides of their students is of little importance in helping students to become successful learners" (p. 17). Given the importance the students I interviewed ascribed to peer relationships, and the potential lasting impact of negative peer relations, it would seem at least some attention be devoted to helping children contend with the social aspects of that make up the invisible (yet critically important) informal school (Gordon, et al., 1999).

CHAPTER SIX

“I Know They Were a Kid Once”: Students’ Experiences with Teachers

The third major theme of this study is participants’ characterizations of experiences with their classroom teachers. Two subthemes are used as a means of organizing this chapter. In the first subtheme I highlight participants’ stories of appreciation about teachers who made a favorable impression. The second subtheme is a presentation of students’ experiences with teachers they perceived of as unfair or disappointing. Data from interviews, focus groups and students’ drawings are presented in support of the overarching theme of this chapter, the students’ experiences with their teachers.

Teachers Who Made Positive Impressions

The focus of this study is students’ school experiences. In this section, I present participants’ accounts of teachers they indicated had made positive impressions. It is important to note that nearly every student had positive things to say about at least one or two of their past or present teachers. This was true even for those students who shared stories about teachers that were mostly negative.

Rewarding teachers

Perhaps predictably, when I asked students to tell me what they liked about their teachers, descriptions of teachers' use of incentives were among the first things children mentioned. Participants spoke appreciatively of teachers' rewarding students by giving them stickers, certificates, candy, or similar items. Powers believed, in fact, that his teachers "be's [were] very nice" *based* on their practice of giving students prizes. Zariah was also pleased with a former teacher's decision to distribute prizes in her classroom.

Zariah: I won *four* awards. I won a writing award, reading, math, mathematics, and I forgot what it's called "student of something" Wait, it's five! Perfect attendance, and best student. And I was in second grade.

Krista: And what did your teacher do when she gave you those awards?

Zariah: Yes. She gave me a bag of candy and then we had a party for all the people who had awards. We had a pizza party for all the people who won awards....It was fun.

According to participants, teachers often chose to encourage their entire class through promises of special rewards, and the children described different motivational programs in use in their classrooms. Sade spoke about a chart posted by her teacher exhorting students to work together to "reach thirty-five stars." When students filled the chart, Sade explained, "we have a class party and everybody has to pick what class party they want to do." When I asked her to tell me about a previous party her class had earned, she reported, "Last time we made our own ice creams! It was delicious!" Rihanna

described being excited whenever her teacher dropped colorful, glass marbles into a large jar prominently displayed in her classroom. Rihanna stated she and her peers eagerly anticipated the parties her teacher planned after the class had earned enough marbles to fill up the jar. Baller explained that he and his classmates earned points whenever their teacher heard students “use vocabulary words or other stuff like that.” After achieving specified point goals Baller’s teacher rewarded students with “extra recess, or extra science, math or something.” Streets appreciated the way his teacher rewarded students as well. He stated he liked it when his teacher took the class outside “for extra recess, ‘cause it’s real fun and it gives us more energy to waste.”

More often than not, my participants’ stories about classroom rewards were linked to students’ behavior. In Joy’s class, their teacher rewarded students with food. From Joy’s perspective, “every time we be really good, she has a buffet.” Students in Joy’s class were invited to select from a variety of food items, including candy and other snacks, as they feasted together at their in-class buffet. Sade also saw connections between her behavior and her teacher’s use of treats. She explained that whenever she was “really good, I get a lollipop.” Streets recalled a time he and some classmates were rewarded with a “whole pack of sour Skittles and stuff and...these popcorn bags we can take home.”

DJ recalled first grade with special fondness because he explained that in his first grade classroom when students were good, “you would get a snack bag and then...pick a

candy that you want.” Even substitute teachers distributed treats for good behavior that DJ remembered.

We had Miss Oster more than one time, probably two times this year...and she was nice. She would give us a little type of candy eggs. She would give us those when we'd be good.

The children I interviewed were wildly enthusiastic about receiving rewards from their teachers. None of the students were the least bit uncomfortable being plied with treats in return for, as Joy and DJ termed it, “be[ing] good.” Despite the children’s excitement about the incentives their teachers provided, researchers suggest caution is warranted. Frymier and Thompson (1992) warn against the overuse of incentives in school, stating, “while many instructors realize they can extrinsically motivate students to perform if they offer a big enough carrot or wield a big enough stick, developing intrinsic motivation is...far more desirable for achieving the goals of education” (p. 390). I will return to the issue of motivation and rewards in greater detail in the conclusion of this chapter.

My participants also shared their impressions of teachers who gave them things even when the students didn’t believe they had done anything to earn an award. Kiyyah told me about a favorite former teacher in whose classroom students “went to the bookstore and got...four free books” as a gift. Kiyyah appreciated the new books because, as she explained, “We went like every two weeks or something! And me and my friends we would pick...the same book. All three the same book and then we would pick the fourth one different. It would be like a book club.” Alyssa liked that fact that one of

her teachers provided her with some school tools that reflected her interest in music. “She gave me a brand new ruler, and it was a violin ruler! She gave me a brand new violin binder with a whole bunch of supplies in it.” Alyssa appreciated the special music-themed supplies because as she put it, “Before I didn’t really have anything. All I had was a boring blue binder.” Powers was touched by his teacher’s act of sacrifice. He reminisced, “They had snack at school. I was about to bring *my* snack and the teacher started giving me some of *her* snack, and that’s the best day ever....and it’s really nice too.”

Although many of my participants were enthusiastic in their descriptions of teachers’ use of awards, prizes, and incentives, they seemed equally appreciative of teachers the students believed tried to connect with them on a personal level. The young people I interviewed referred to those teachers they believed connected with them personally as their “best,” “favorite,” or “nice[st]” teachers. In the next section, I present stories detailing participants’ perceptions of the strategies their teachers used to connect with them in this way.

Personal teachers

In addition to expressing their interest in teachers who personally connected with students, several participants described *how* those teachers attempted to connect with them. One way participants believed teachers connected with them was by recognizing

their own and others' birthdays. Zariah was grateful one of her former teachers permitted her to visit her younger brother on his birthday as the following excerpt attests.

Zariah: On my brother's birthday when I was in fourth grade, his birthday...was during the school day. And I was in my fourth grade teacher's [class]. She let me go down to my brother's. If you have somebody in the school is having a birthday party, she lets you go down to the room so you can celebrate it with them.

Krista: Oh, that's nice! What did your brother say when you came into his room?

Zariah: He hugged me.

Krista: How'd that make you feel?

Zariah: Happy.

Krista: Yeah, that's sweet. Do any of your other teachers do that or is she the only one?

Zariah: Except for my fifth grade and my third grade teachers. Because they only let me go if I was related to them. If my friend, friend's cousin, or my friend's little brother had a birthday party and they knew me, and I was their friend, she wouldn't let me go.

Adults at school might not consider the birthday of a good friend's sibling adequate reason to justify allowing a student to leave class. However, many of my participants lived far from their school sites or in neighborhoods that made socializing with friends outside of school challenging. This makes it easier to understand why students valued teachers who invited students to celebrate their own and others' birthdays during the

school day. For many of my participants, without in-class recognitions of birthdays they might not have had other opportunities to mark these special occasions. Monét struggled to understand why students were denied opportunities to acknowledge their peers' birthdays while school was in session. During an interview she retorted, "If it's someone's birthday, why *can't* they celebrate it at school with all their friends?" As far as my participants were concerned, acknowledging milestone events like birthdays demonstrated teachers' personal involvement, and care for students.

In addition to birthday celebrations, the children I spoke about a variety of special events that they perceived helped to foster personal connections between students and teachers. When I asked Kiyyah to tell me about a special day at school, she spoke instead about an event organized by her teacher that took place *outside* of school.

Kiyyah: It was last year on June 10th.

Krista: What happened?

Krista: We went to our teacher's house near the beach and spent the night.

Krista: Wow! What did you guys do that for?

Kiyyah: I guess she does it with all her students. She just likes us to meet her family and stuff. We just have fun.

Krista: What do you remember about that day?

Kiyyah: We had a night walk. And, we were basically trying to find candy, a bag of candy [on the walking trail], and then we all got some. And then we started sneaking it! (We both giggle.) Then Miss Bea found out, and she was all right

with it. We had a scavenger hunt [too]. We went to the beach, and we went to go see sea gulls and one of them pooped on my friend's head! (Pauses and grins.)

[But] he was wearin' a hood.

Kiyyah wasn't sure why her teacher chose to invite her students to her beach house, but it is clear from her description that she enjoyed the invitation to join her classmates at their teacher's home. During a group interview, Rihanna talked about a memory of a special event her teacher organized, but in Rihanna's case, the classroom served as the event location. "Last time we had a sleepover party. It was so, so fun! I was dancing, we had the music going it was like, freak out!"

Both Kiyyah and Rihanna's transcripts speak to the girls' enthusiasm for their teachers' decisions to plan special social events. Frymier and Thompson's (1992) research would seem to contradict this finding, as the authors stated that "*self-inclusion*—providing frequent opportunities for student-teacher interactions that are not task related, such as social activities" (p. 398) was one of the affinity-seeking techniques employed by teachers that is not tied to students' overall motivation. It is possible, of course, that the events Kiyyah's and Rihanna's teachers planned were intended to improve student motivation, but it is just as likely that the girls' teachers understood the importance of getting to know their students better. Staging social events outside of class may be one way to do this.

Frymier and Thompson may be correct in their assertion that teachers and students occupy different social circles, but as these excerpts demonstrate, students

appreciate teachers' desire to connect with them, even in a non-task related manner, providing that those connection attempts are not perceived by students as being *too* personal. Kiyyah, for example, may have been aghast at a teacher's attempt to insert herself in the DKW group, but inviting students to visit her beach house was something Kiyyah and her classmates seemed to have appreciated.

While in-class sleepovers and trips to the beach require an extraordinary amount of time, planning, and special permissions, students weren't impressed by big gestures alone. As these next transcript segment show, students took pleasure in their teachers' efforts to personally connect with them by revealing something of themselves. Rhino, for instance, spoke with particular delight about her teacher's decision to bring her infant daughter to the classroom for a visit.

Rhino: A special day is when my teacher brought in her baby after she had the baby. It was like a week after Obama gave his famous speech. And [another] teacher had her baby the same day that Obama gave his speech! And you should see the baby's got the hugest cheeks (Rhino puffs her cheeks out), you barely can see his eyes! [It's] funny. Yeah and then her name is Lindsay Nora Yardley. She has a long name.

Krista: What about her bringing the baby made the day special for you?

Rhino: Well, we got to see the baby! We were like, *dying* for twelve weeks without seeing the baby.

Participants also shared that they felt pleased when teachers chose to share their family photos with students. The children's enthusiasm for photos of their teachers' families suggest their interest in knowing something about their teachers' lives apart from their professional duties. From Streets' perspective, family photos helped him and his classmates connect on a personal level with their teacher.

Streets: She showed us a picture when she got married! (Smiles.)

Krista: She did? Tell me about that.

Streets: Like, they both was holding hands, and her cousins was there and they was smiling. And one of her cousins had a big smile; it was like a cheesy smile.

Krista: How did it make you feel that she shared her wedding picture with your class?

Streets: It made me feel kinda good because no one showed me something like [that]. No one showed me something that would be like, *inside* of her, and that was something that was pretty inside not outside, [that] she can share.

Rogers (1969) argued that three factors, trust, realness and empathic understanding, helped build strong relationships with students. Streets' pleasure at being given a window into the "inside not outside" life of his classroom teacher speaks to Rogers' notion of teachers' realness or authenticity with their students. Like Streets, Tommy applauded his teacher's decision to bring photos of her family in the classroom. Having a teacher who lived near the school provided him with occasional opportunities to meet his teacher outside the school context, something he also enjoyed.

Tommy: When I was in kindergarten, sometimes I would meet her at Thompson Pond Park. And, I *also* know, that her husband is a police officer. And I also know that she has a kid. And that's really much that I know!

Krista: And *how*, do you know those facts about her family and about her?

Tommy: One, when I was in kindergarten, when she had a baby she put up the pictures on the wall. And also, I know that her husband is a police officer is that when I met her at the pond. I saw her husband, and the baby on a stroller. And the husband was inside his uniform.

In addition to sharing family photos, students spoke warmly about teachers who reached out to them at school in other ways. In Kiyah's case, her teacher made students feel at home in the classroom.

Kiyah: My third grade teacher, she used to act as a mom for us and stuff.

Krista: How would she act like a mom?

Kiyah: She would be motherly and nice and stuff. And then one time, we all called her "mom!" (Smiles.)

Krista: What did she say [in response]?

Kiyah: (Grins.) She was like, "Yes?"

An excerpt from Monét sheds further light on the importance students placed on teachers who personally connected with students. During one of our conversations Monét spoke about two of her teachers, including the teacher depicted in her drawing (see Figure 6).

I like my teacher Miss Bea. Well, she's kind of came in half the year because my teacher was on maternity leave? And then, I like her 'cause she's really nice and she understands like each student and everything. And then, I like my art teacher, 'cause she's my mentor and I'm kind of close to her, but she's really nice and stuff. ...All the bussing kids have mentors. So, they assigned me her. And, I told you she's my mentor, but she's like really, *really* nice and she's always there to help somebody if he needs it. Like, she gave me a birthday party

Figure 6. Monét's school drawing.



on my birthday! Not like this big thing, but like you invited like three friends to go over to her room, and she bring [brought] cupcakes.

As she created her picture, Monét took care to ensure her drawing matched her memory recalling specific details and adding them to her picture. Monét noted that the art teacher, “was wearing a lime green shirt...well, it was kind of lime green. It was darker, but it was still lime green.” Monét also included, “the [purple] headband that she always wears everyday.” The level of detail in her drawing seems to underscore the significance Monét attributed to her relationship with art teacher, and her appreciation for the teacher’s attention.

Monét received a mentor because, as she understood it, “all the bussing kids have mentors.” Other students spoke about the roles their schools played in providing programs or initiatives that helped students and teachers connect personally. Streets expounded on his role as a participant in a special program at school.

Streets: I think it was on a Thursday when I had Mr. Kaye, ‘cause usually in the middle of the day, he calls me and other friends...out of the classroom. And then we play basketball, we do roller-skating in the gym, and we do roller-skating in the roller skating park in my school.

Krista: And why do you guys get to do that?

Streets: Because, my, my mom she signed us up. And she, she did it right before other, six parents signed up...

Krista: Okay. What do you like best about those times with that teacher and your buddies?

Streets: That, just that, at least I get to like have free time with my own friends... Yeah. We talk sometimes.... We talk about what we do in our week. ... We just talk about people's week, and they say like, "What do you do with your week?"

Streets looked forward to his weekly opportunity to spend time with one of the few male teachers at his school as well as with some of his friends. The Thursday sessions were, from Streets' perspective, structured in such a way that he felt he was having "free time." Being able to talk with Mr. Kaye while participating in an activity Streets and his friends enjoyed made the program worthwhile. Rihanna also appreciated being given a unique opportunity to know her classroom teacher better as part of her membership in a special club at her school.

Rihanna: My new teacher, she's pretty nice. She's known me for a long time, because I do a [[unclear]] group.

Krista: (Clarifying) You do what group?

Rihanna: Yeah. It's for African American people. There's like a group at school. My school it's called Destiny Group, and so what we do is we talk about things, we learn about things, we have snacks. It's like, we call it school again, but it's afterschool.

Monét, Streets, and Rihanna all expressed their appreciation for the school-sponsored programs they participated in that the children perceived of as being responsive to their interests and needs as individuals. Programs such as the ones described by my participants are beneficial to the degree that the children feel valued as members.

Whether teachers fostered these connections by bringing in family photos, taking time to plan special events, or simply acknowledging students' achievements by handing out incentives, my participants appreciated the efforts teachers made to connect with them. In the next section I present the students' descriptions of experiences with teachers that the children felt were disappointing.

Disappointing Experiences with Teachers

The students I interviewed were not shy about discussing the things they perceived that their teachers did or the qualities they perceived their teachers possessed that children found frustrating or upsetting in some way. The children categorized "mean" teachers on the basis of specific incidents with teachers the children perceived of as unfair or disappointing. In other words, "meanness" was not described in terms of a personality trait residing in an individual teacher, but in terms of the teachers' actions, decisions, or words that children considered mean.

In this section I borrow Levering's (2000) definition of disappointment. He argues disappointment is "the unpleasant feeling that occurs when desired expectations of sufficient importance do not come true" (p. 66). Essential to understanding the data

presented within this subtheme is an appreciation that although children and adults may react to identical situations in very different ways, both adults and children express disappointment about only those things they perceive of as important (Levering, 2000). In other words, while the experiences precipitating an adult or child's feelings of disappointment are not universal, the legitimacy of an individual's disappointment is.

Mean Teachers

Many of my participants expressed disappointment that as they moved through elementary school they believed they encountered progressively "meaner" teachers. In other words, the students believed first grade teachers acted nicer to students than third grade teachers and so on. An excerpt from Kiyah is illustrative of this idea. She stated, "I liked my teachers up to fifth grade and then they started being mean and stuff." DJ also believed the teachers he'd had as a younger student had been nicer to him and his classmates. I've chosen to feature one of his invited drawings as a means of introducing this subsection of findings.

Our conversation about his picture helps to explain the students' belief that teachers got "meaner" as students continued through elementary school. As mentioned in chapter three, students' pictures tended to center on more the physical aspects of school, such as buildings, playgrounds and desks in classrooms than on drawings of people. A

few students did choose to include people in their pictures, and two of those drawings are presented in this chapter (Figures 6 and 7).

As he began his drawing, DJ talked about an incident that had occurred in the classroom in which his teacher, like the female figure in his illustration, was unable to conceal her anger with her students.

Figure 7. DJ's classroom drawing.



DJ: Well, I'm not doing the whole desks because that's going to take a long time. But you know, sometimes her face would turn red, so I did these red spots just to describe how she is.

Krista: Can you think of a day that didn't happen too long ago when you saw her cheeks turn red like that?

DJ: (Shrugs.) Today....because she has a high temper, that's why!

A little while later during the interview, as DJ worked on coloring his illustration, we again spoke about his picture. I asked DJ to explain what was happening in his drawing, in other words, what the figures in his drawing were doing.

DJ: Well, we're doing...Oh, my god! I forgot to put the arms! (Laughs.)

Krista: (Laughs.) While you're giving them arms, do you want to tell me about the picture? What's happening? Which one is you?

DJ: (Points to figure on the left.) This one. The teacher's yelling at us saying, "Do your work!" And we are doing our work, like when I told you [before] she yells at us for no reason.

DJ also asserted that his previous teachers were more likeable than the teacher he depicted in his drawing above.

DJ: My past teachers, they never yelled. My past *nice* teachers.

Krista: Your past teachers? Do you mean like second grade or first grade teachers?

DJ: Yeah.

Krista: Tell me about your past teachers.

DJ: They're all nicer than the teacher that I have right now.

Tashala also believed that teachers were meaner as she moved to a new grade level each year. She explained the situation in this way:

In third grade, the people who were in my class, we used to think that our third grade teachers were really mean, but now when we went, into fourth grade? We realized that they're not mean at all.

It is important to note that in this case Tashala meant her third grade teachers were *not* "mean" when compared to her new fourth grade teachers. As a final example of students' belief that the teachers they had as they moved through school were somehow meaner than those they'd had previously, I present the following excerpt from my interview with Alyssa. In response to whether she felt welcome at her school, Alyssa replied,

Alyssa: Not really, 'cause I'm a[n] old student.

Krista: What does that mean?

Alyssa: Like, I been there since kindergarten. So, it's kinda hard. 'Cause you can usually see how the teachers act, and they act different. First they act nice, and then each grade it [a student] gets into, they act meaner.

Krista: Can you give me an example?

Alyssa: (Nods.) Once they're nice, and then they're like nice and mean. Then they're mean, then they're *really* mean, and then they're mean, mean, mean!

Beyond the enjoyment Alyssa took from her violin classes, Alyssa expressed a sense of disillusionment with school. Students experience disillusionment as a result of “serious disappointment” (Levering, 2000, p. 67). Alyssa’s transcripts suggest her disillusionment with school is, at least partially, related to sustained feelings of disappointment with her most recent teachers. Her statement also suggests Alyssa wanted her teachers to consider the impact of their in-class behavior from the student perspective. It seems clear Alyssa felt such consideration was a necessary first step toward change for “mean” teachers.

As DJ and Alyssa’s excerpts demonstrate, being yelled at was the single most frequently mentioned example of disappointing behavior students experienced at school. Some of my participants perceived that their teachers’ yelling was as habitual as it was disappointing. Students complained that, from their perspectives, teachers yelled, “too much,” “for no reason,” and as far as one participant was concerned, “all day long.” A few students, in contrast maintained that their teachers yelled only as a result of having been provoked. Describing how his teacher handled students’ in-class behavior, Baller stated, “Well, sometimes...she might have to yell at them because they’re not following directions.” Tommy observed, “If we get into *lots* of trouble, then he gets angry....He has to yell. [But] most of the time he never yells.” Regardless of the reasons the children perceived that their teachers’ yelled, participants who spoke about teachers’ yelling were almost unanimous in the belief that being yelled at was unfair. Instead of yelling,

children suggested teachers consider “be[ing] more gentle now and then,” or “giv[ing] us a warning.”

In the following excerpt, Alyssa addresses the question of what she liked best about her school, a public charter with a music emphasis. In her response, Alyssa shifts from a description of what she appreciated about her school to frustration with some of her teachers.

Alyssa: Well, I know that they play the violin, and they do a very good job with the environment and stuff.

Krista: Tell me about the environment at your school.

Alyssa: They have a lot of money and they support us and other people support us there, not just the school.

Krista: How does your school support you?

Alyssa: Well, they help us with anything. They give us free money for book fairs and stuff. Sometimes people donate because sometimes the teachers brag about the beautiful school we have.

Krista: Tell me about your teachers.

Alyssa: Well, my teachers are kind of mean, but I can deal with it.

Krista: What, do you mean by ‘mean?’

Alyssa: Like, they yell at kids because they do something wrong, like on a[n] answer sheet. And that’s it.

Krista: What does it make you feel when teachers yell?

Alyssa: It makes me feel upset! Because they wouldn't like [it]; I know they were a kid once and I'm sure they didn't like when *their* teacher yelled at them, so they shouldn't yell at us.

Krista: What do you think teachers could do differently?

Alyssa: Stop yelling.

Alyssa described what she believed set her school apart from other schools in her neighborhood. She appreciated her school's campus, its resources, and most of all, how her school's resources and special opportunities benefitted students (i.e. money for the book fair). Alyssa also highlighted what she believed disappointed her about school: being given "mean" teachers, portrayed by Alyssa as individuals who "yelled" at students. Her comment, "I'm sure they didn't like when *their* teacher yelled at them, so they shouldn't yell at us" speaks to her belief that yelling at students was unfair. Although the children I interviewed argued that being yelled at by teachers was a fairly typical school occurrence, it was not, as far as my participants were concerned the only mean or unfair thing teachers did. In the sections that follow, I present excerpts showcasing teacher behaviors other than yelling that students perceived of as being unfair.

Unfair Teachers

In addition to participants' perceptions that they received meaner teachers as they moved to a new grade and disliked teachers who yelled, the students I spoke to found

certain teacher behaviors unfair. One of the challenges to teacher-student relationships is the fact that teachers must enforce school-wide and classroom specific rules. Students are almost inevitably bound to feel constrained by rules that dictate when they can speak, eat, leave their seat or take a break. As a final example of the kinds of experiences with teachers students perceived of as disappointing, I present participants' accounts of teachers' responses to students who violated rules. Alyssa was offended that the teacher who took over Alyssa's class mid-year did not follow some of the rules and expectations established by her former teacher. When I asked her what made her refer to teachers as "mean" Alyssa replied,

Well, they really yell. They send us downstairs for just a *little* thing, and if it's a little problem they make it into a big deal....Like, today! We didn't know not to use the white boards? And they weren't hers, they were the old teacher's! And she started yelling at us, and she took away all my recess! She sent me downstairs, and two other kids came downstairs [with me] to talk with the head of the school.

From Alyssa's point of view, her new teacher was "mean," because Alyssa and her friends received punishment for borrowing classroom materials (white boards and dry erase markers) that their previous teacher had invited them to use during recess periods. Not only did Alyssa lose access to the materials she enjoyed using, she also lost her recess. Her new teacher's reaction to the girls' use of the materials seemed unfair to Alyssa and her friends. Alyssa's frustration with her teacher's actions is very much in keeping with Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey's (1991) research on what they referred to as

teacher misbehaviors. In their research the authors argued that unreasonable or arbitrary rules were found to be particularly offensive as far as students were concerned.

Kiyyah was also angry that her teacher behaved in a manner both she and her friends thought was “mean,” as the following excerpt shows.

Kiyyah: She took my bear, my gimp, and there was somethin’ else but I forgot.

Krista: What’s a gimp?

Kiyyah: Yeah, it’s this. (She pulls out her backpack and rummages inside it for a few moments, pulling out a keychain made out of bright plastic lacing braided together.)

Krista: Oh. Do you think you’ll get it back tomorrow?

Kiyyah: I don’t know.

Krista: You don’t know. Other than taking stuff from you, what else makes this teacher—

Kiyyah: (Anticipates me.) She’s mean in general during class time [and] stuff like that.

Krista: What does she do that’s mean, or what does she say?

Kiyyah: She’s not only mean to *me*, but she’s mean to my friends and stuff. She said that this girl was talking and stuff like that, and she was being rude, and then she snapped at her. And then, she (the student) was like, “I wasn’t talking or anything!” And then she’s (the teacher’s) like, “You’re talking back right now!” When she (the student) didn’t even hear anything!

Kiyyah's experiences in the classroom led her to conclude that her teacher treated her and her friends unfairly. She was confused why her teacher punished her friend when her friend wasn't talking, and angry that her teacher could exert control over her personal belongings. Based on her perception of her teacher's actions, Kiyyah labeled the teacher as "mean in general." In fairness to Kiyyah's teacher, there may well have been official school rules in place prohibiting students from bringing personal items into the classroom. Sade, Powers, Alyssa, and DJ, for example, spoke about specific rules prohibiting students from bringing personal possessions including cell phones, toys and electronics with them to school. The frustration for Kiyyah seemed not to reside with the fact that her toy was taken from her but with her uncertainty with when, or if, it would be returned.

Several participants spoke about teachers who they believed exhibited favoritism towards certain students as an example of unfairness. During my first focus group interview, Joy, Zariah and Monet spoke about their frustration with teachers who "played favorites" in their classrooms.

K: Okay, Zariah, what's something that teachers do that upsets kids? Upsets, bothers annoys, frustrates?

Zariah: Like if, like if? (Pause.)

Joy: (Clarifies my question.) Just you.

Zariah: (Pause.) If because some teachers they might be related to some students in the class. And if they treat them better than the other kids, and, if they don't see

that that they act that way, (like rude around other kids) they might think they act nice, but if they do somethin' to you, and you try to tell 'em? They don't believe you.

Monét: Yeah! Like, they like say, they say, "Oh, no! Why are you being rude to me?" It's so annoying.

Zariah: Yeah, and they try to blame it on you, that you was the one that ought to know.

Monét: Even though, like, okay say I was the teacher right? And I was related to her? (Gestures to Zariah.) I'd be like, " Ohm, *hi!* How is so-and-do doing?" But then to her (Nods to Joy.) I was like, "Hi. How are you doing?" What the heck? Like, I would get really irritated with her.

Krista: So what I'm hearing you guys say, is what's frustrating is when teachers play favorites?

Zariah: (Nods.) Yeah!

Krista: Whether it's that they're related to the person, or-

Monét: (Anticipates me.) Or, they just like the person. Or the person like for instance, like there's this girl in my class? And she's deaf? And the teacher-, and like, I *get* the point, like she needs to kind of be with her, because she can't hear you?

Krista: Right.

Zariah: But then again, you don't...like in *school* she *knows* not to go like...

(Mimes frantically waving her hand back and forth.)

Monét: But she does it anyway, and like everybody's sitting here (Monét mimes "proper" hand raising posture.) and she's like, "Out with the patient hand!"

(Monét rolls her eyes and slaps her hand on the table twice as she says this.) And she's [the teacher's] like, "[I'll] pick on her," and I'm like, I *get* [it], she does need some [help], but not *that* much!

Monét argued the deaf student in her classroom received assistance that went beyond what she believed was necessary. As she was making her case, Zariah chimed in, expressing her belief that *every* child knows the proper way to raise one's hand for permission to speak in a classroom.

Monét's teacher might view her approach to the student described in the above excerpt as an appropriate adjustment to classroom routines accommodating for the child's deafness. As schools have shifted toward full inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms, the social implications of inclusion has become a subject of debate (Nowicki, 2002). Research has shown that non-disabled peers are not necessarily accepting of children with special needs, and non-disabled peers can have negative attitudes towards classmates with special needs (Hall, 1994; Kluwin & Gonsler, 1994; Nowicki, 2002). Monét and Zariah's exchange suggests that non-disabled peers may view teachers' accommodations for exceptional students as preferential treatment.

Certainly, Monét believed that the way her teacher dealt with her classmate's deafness was a confirmation of her classmate's status as one of her teacher's favorite students.

Other participants also believed that their teachers played favorites or liked some students better than others. Tommy was certain his teacher's favorite student was his classmate Chloe. When I asked Tommy what convinced him Chloe was his teacher's favorite, he responded, "Well, she mostly knows most of the questions Mr. Greggs asks." Streets felt that when teachers directed questions it was evidence of a teacher's favoritism. Streets stated it was obvious teachers liked certain students, "Because she would call on you and say, 'What's the answer?' and stuff like that.

Rhino argued that her teacher disliked her and a good friend, "[Be]cause when I, [and] well, my friend Nyasha too, when we raise our hands we never get picked." Rhino also believed her teacher had, "two teacher's pets" and she observed a difference in her teacher's responses to the incorrect answers given by Rhino and these two girls.

Rhino: They're very smart, and [answer] every question she puts [to] them. Well, some of the questions they just get wrong, and she just says, "Try again!"

Krista: And what happens when you try a question and you get it wrong, what does she tell you?

Rhino: "Good try."

Krista: Do you get to try again?

Rhino: No.

Showing favoritism is considered to be a teacher behavior that students find objectionable (Kearney, et al., 1991). It is perhaps not surprising therefore that my participants mentioned teachers who “played favorites” as being particularly unfair. The students’ responses suggest that one reason favoritism is perceived of negatively is related to broader issues such as respect and fairness. Monét, for example was frustrated by what she experienced as unfair modifications to classroom routines for one student. From Rhino’s perspective, her teacher seemed unfair because the response Rhino received for wrong answers, “good try” lacked the respect she felt her teacher showed to other classmates, “try again.”

Kids Teachers Don’t Like

So many of my participants spoke about their belief that teachers favored particular children that I followed up many of those discussions with questions about whether children believed the reverse was also true. In other words, the student I interviewed perceived that their teachers treated some children “better” than they treated the class as a whole. I wanted to determine the degree to which students felt certain students were treated less well than the rest of the class. In response to my questions, several children described students in their classroom they didn’t think their teachers liked very much. Interestingly, some of the participants who spoke about this issue didn’t feel their teachers’ apparent dislike of particular students was necessarily unfair.

Zariah believed her teacher disliked a boy in her class named Jeff. She explained her teacher often sent Jeff “to the fourth grade classroom.” According to Zariah, her teacher sent Jeff out of the classroom so frequently that Jeff spent nearly “the whole day at the fourth grade classroom.” Since Zariah thought Jeff “always has to play around too much,” she surmised, “I think she [the teacher] doesn’t like him, ‘cause she gets tired of it. ‘Cause he does it *every* day.” Tommy was convinced his classmate Marcus was a troublemaker, and therefore, not well liked by his teacher. As far as Tommy was concerned, Marcus was “not behaving as he should be” in class, and it was for this reason that his teacher routinely asked the classroom assistant “to take him on a walk break.” Streets also thought his teachers had students they didn’t like, but unlike most of my participants, Streets wasn’t sure this was a problem. When I asked Streets to explain how he knew if his teachers did not like someone, he replied,

Streets: ‘Cause they can be bad in class and gym, and do bad work and never getting work done, the teacher won’t like them, ‘cause she’s a teacher and they’re just bad people.

Krista: Do you think it’s okay for teachers to have students they don’t like?

Streets: Yeah.

Krista: Why?

Streets: Because it’s her feelings. Like it’s okay because it’s her feelings and other people are bad kids.

Although Streets embraced his teacher's right to dislike "bad kids," research suggests that students benefit when they have good relationships with their teachers. Students who perceive their relationships with teachers are good, are more likely to feel connected or bonded to their school community (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Feeling connected to school is important at all grades, but particularly as students move into their adolescent years. Results from a national longitudinal study make a compelling case that students' physical, social, and even emotional health are impacted by the degree to which students feel connected to school (Resnick, et al., 1997). Studies such as these demonstrate the importance of positive teacher-student relationships.

Conclusion

The children I interviewed shared numerous stories about their experiences with teachers. Some of the stories the children centered on participants' enthusiasm for teachers who made favorable impressions on them. In other cases, stories centered on experiences with teachers that had, in some way, been perceived of as disappointing.

In terms of teachers' making favorable impressions, my participants uniformly praised teachers who gave them candy, toys, or other incentives as rewards for good attendance, correctly completed assignments, or using good behavior. Although the children liked this practice, researchers argue that it is problematic. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) state that supplying tokens (such as food) in order to reward students

manifests status differences between teachers and students. They stated, “Teachers have many opportunities to demonstrate the hierarchical relation between themselves and students. They can punish through grades and detentions. They can threaten that they will not let students do enjoyable things...unless they behave” (p. 89). Others go so far as to suggest that offering children external incentives are detrimental to their internal motivation (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001).

In a study completed with “reluctant learners” attending an alternative high school, Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) asked students to describe factors they believed contributed to their success or failure (p. 34). Echoing motivation research Daniels and Arapostathis argued,

Extrinsic rewards tamper with people’s relation to the activity. Instead of engaging in it because of the inherent pleasure within, they see it as a means to an end, which traditional schooling fosters through its reliance on grades, points and other such rewards. (p. 47)

Of course, not all of the students’ descriptions of their teachers centered on being given rewards or tokens. Many children spoke warmly about teachers who took time to connect with them personally. The children’s transcripts demonstrate that as teachers reached out to students, regardless of whether those attempts came in the form of sleepovers, photographs, or sharing their snacks, such efforts were appreciated. The children I interviewed consistently expressed their enjoyment and approval of teachers who worked hard to foster personal connections. Bell and Daly (1984) established a list

of 25 affinity-seeking techniques used by individuals when they attempt to get others to like them. Teachers' incorporation of some of these techniques have been found to motivate students in many ways, including academically (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Gorham, Kelley, & McCroskey, 1989; Teven, 2001).

The students I spoke to also expressed a keen sense of disappointment about school in regard to experiences with their teachers. The students tended to define teachers' yelling at students as both evidence for a particular teacher's "meanness," and as the single most commonly mentioned unfair classroom experience. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) point out that teachers have both a responsibility and a right to exert control over their students. They go so far as to suggest that this responsibility is, in fact, "one of the self evident features of the school" (p. 88). The issue for my participants was not an objection to rules per se, but being subjected to teachers' raised voices as a form of control. Students were simply dissatisfied by this approach to managing the classroom, but data suggest they felt powerless to change the situation. According to Teven (2001), students who perceive teachers as verbally aggressive consider those teachers to be uncaring. In another study Teven and McCroskey (1996) demonstrated that college students believed they learned more in courses taught by teachers they perceived as caring. These studies suggest attending to students' perspectives on "mean" teachers is warranted.

In addition to their perceptions of having been yelled at, the students shared stories about other events, incidents, and experiences with teachers that they believed

were unfair. My participants were frustrated by what they perceived of as teachers' inconsistent or confusing application of school or classroom rules. They were dismayed by what they perceived of as teachers' decisions to play favorites. A smaller number of participants felt there were students in their classrooms that teachers liked less than others, but not all of them thought this was unfair. Research, however, overwhelming demonstrates the lasting impact of positive relationships with teachers on students' academic achievement and motivation, as well as their social-emotional development (e.g., Battisch, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Roeser, et al., 2000; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

The findings presented in this chapter point to the importance students' placed on their experiences with their teachers. The data presented here also affirm the central role teachers play in terms of shaping students' "interest and engagement in class and school" (Osterman, 2000). The data presented here emphasize the students' appreciation for teachers they perceived of as being caring. Obviously, there are incredible demands placed upon teachers, particularly those teachers who work in urban school environments. These demands may make it difficult for teachers to communicate their concern for the young people they teach. Yet, as Teven and McCroskey (1997) contend, teachers must make every effort to find ways to demonstrate their interest and concern for their students, because, "if a teacher cares deeply, but does not communicate that attribute, he or she might as well not care at all" (p. 1).

CHAPTER SEVEN

“More I Gotta Say”: Students’ Experiences with Voice

Giroux (1988b) defines voice as, “principles of dialogue as they are enunciated and enacted within particular social settings” (p. 199). Building on Giroux’s idea, Medina, Bradburry, and Pearson state that voice is manifested in “situated dialogues or forms of self-expression that are socially and culturally constructed” (2005, p. 207). Citing their international research with secondary students, Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma (2000) note that when translated, the Finnish term for voice encompasses a range of meanings, including “sound,” “voice” and even, “having a voice” (p. 179).

As I analyzed participants’ stories, I found myself comparing these different, yet complementary understandings of voice with data from interviews, small group conversations and students’ drawings. I discovered many parallels in the stories the students shared with me and Gordon et al.’s (2000) translation of voice as both physical sound, interpersonal communication, and students’ right to have (and express) voice. In keeping with Giroux and Medina et al., I interpreted the students’ stories in light of the social, cultural, and institutional aspects that make schools distinct.

The main research question for this study is “How do culturally and linguistically diverse children experience elementary school and how do these students describe their schooling experiences?” One of the central concepts of interest to the theoretical

underpinnings and research aims of this dissertation is voice. Prior to continuing with this chapter, I briefly summarize the findings of preceding chapters.

In Chapter Four, I detailed students' experiences with learning, a process the children referred to as "getting it." I argued that the my participants' outlook on learning was influenced by their performance orientations towards learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), external indicators (such as report card grades and teachers' confirmations they'd answered questions correctly) students' cited as proof of their learning, and their experiences in the roles of pretenders, cheats or nervous wrecks in regard to standardized testing requirements.

In Chapter Five, I outlined students' experiences with their peers. Far from simple interactions, the students' stories demonstrate the complexity of student relationships, the difficulty of negative peer interactions on students, and the children's general dissatisfaction with adults' responses to peer problems. I argued that the social sphere, occupying the informal school layer (Gordon, et al., 1999), is generally of little interest to adult school personnel despite research evidence pointing to the important connections between the social and academic spheres. In Chapter Six, I described students' experiences with their teachers. The children spoke about the actions and attributes of teachers who made favorable impressions, as well as interactions with teachers the students perceived of as unfair or disappointing.

In this final findings chapter I highlight participants' experiences with voice in both the school and research contexts. It is possible that some of the material presented

in this chapter seems to echo, in varying degrees, material presented previously. In Chapter Four, I mentioned that decisions about how to present findings are fundamentally interpretive, and thus it is almost inevitable that other patterns for the organization and presentation of these data are possible. I've chosen to tease out "voice" excerpts from my corpus of data because I believe doing so allows for comparisons between the ways children experienced voice in school and in this study to be more easily drawn. In terms of the organization of this chapter, the first section deals the students' perceptions of the "voice lessons" they received in school. Not surprisingly, perhaps, transcripts show students believed voice was something to be regulated by adults in school. Data also suggest that participants felt uncomfortable "talking back" (hooks, 1989) at school, even though speaking out in this manner is argued to be a necessary step for developing an independent voice. As I will show, students occasionally viewed silence as a rather ironic means of expressing voice without fear of reprisal. In the second section of this chapter, I highlight examples of the ways in which this study served to elevate student voice. The final section is a demonstration of how I, as the researcher, may have been guilty of suppressing participants' voices from time to time. In this section I describe some of the challenges I faced as I undertook the completion of a study predicated on student voice.

Talking Back or Keeping Silent: Voice Lessons at School

The young people I interviewed offered many descriptions of the ways they experienced voice in school. Transcripts reflect three key orientations. First, students

experienced voice as something regulated and monitored by adults. Second, although “talking back” (hooks, 1989) is argued to be empowering and liberating, most of my participants were unwilling to talk back to adults at school even in instances in which the children felt they were being misunderstood by adults. Third, perhaps as a result of their unwillingness to “talk back,” some students’ accounts highlight decisions to remain silent as an ironic example of voice. I begin with examples of the ways in which students experienced voice as regulated by adults.

In the excerpt below, Rihanna describes the system her teacher used to monitor students’ in-class communication. I begin with this excerpt because of Rihanna described an atypical system in use in her classroom.

Rihanna: My teacher’s a calm teacher. She actually doesn’t get mad. So, if you’re talkin’ too loud, she makes us put on a zero.

Krista: What does that mean, “put on a zero?”

Rihanna: So we have like a voice meter chart. They show on the chart one to three. So zero means like being quiet until whatever [whenever] she picks.

Usually it’s five [or] ten minutes. And then, that’s when we actually concentrate and nobody really talks. And then a one is when you can whisper [or] not speak so loud....One is whispering [like] I told you. Two is normal talking and then three is outdoor talking.

Rihanna experienced voice as in terms of a noise level to be measured and controlled by her teacher. She mentions for example, that the students are told to “put on a zero” (or

remain silent) for a set period of time. Rihanna believed that it was during these “zero” periods that students were able to “actually concentrate” in the classroom. Concentration, from Rihanna’s point of view was a prerequisite for learning, and silence was a prerequisite for concentration. The students in Rihanna’s classroom looked at the chart displayed by the teacher and complied with whatever level the teacher selected for students. While Rihanna referred to the chart as a “voice meter chart,” it would seem that the system put in place by her teacher governed social interactions as much as noise levels. During a zero period, no verbal interactions between students would be tolerated. Whispering (level one) allows for some interaction between students, with level two (“normal talking”) permitting the most natural opportunities for conversation and interaction among students. The challenge for Rihanna and her classmates from a sociocultural viewpoint is that interpersonal communication and student learning are not separable. Vygotsky (1978) offered compelling evidence that social interaction is, in fact, necessary for learning and is even what is being learned. To the extent that Rihanna’s teacher’s “voice meter chart” limits social interaction, some students may experience difficulty. To be fair, Rihanna states that she and her classmates were required to be silent for brief periods of time, but the decision about when students were permitted to talk normally, not talk at all, whisper or use outdoor voices was out of the students’ control. This pattern is reflective of traditional models of schooling in which students are meant to listen and teachers are meant to talk (Zhang & Kortner, 1995). I maintain, that viewed

from a Vygotskian perspective, limiting student voice can have the effect of limiting learning.

The majority of students did not describe systems for monitoring students' voice levels, or conversational opportunities in the manner Rihanna stated her teacher employed. However, students did speak about the various rules and expectations governing *when* children were permitted to talk in school. Several participants described instances in which they got into trouble for talking during periods of the school day they knew they were supposed to either be silent per their teachers' instructions or actively listening to teachers' lessons.

Rhino argued that there were certain circumstances that made following teachers' rules for silence virtually impossible. She believed her teacher occasionally expected too much from students, as this excerpt details.

Rhino: I have a nice teacher. My teacher's nice, except when she [[unclear]]

Krista: Except what?

Rhino: She gets mad. She yells at us.

Krista: What's the thing that makes her get angry the most often?

Rhino: When nobody listens.

Krista: Okay, so this is going to be the last one, I promise. What makes kids not listen in school?

Rhino: When she gives us—, like, when we get our book orders! We get to order books and we get them about a week later, and they're [the students are] like

talking about what book they get. Like ever get, and all that stuff. And then as soon as she says, “Quiet,” they don’t listen and they keep talking. They like quiet down, and then after she stops, she goes, “Today, we’re gonna do...” and then she pauses? And then we all start talking and all that stuff. And then we’re talking, talking, and she yells at us, and I don’t know why. It’s not our fault, we’re *kids*. (Sighs.)

As far as Rhino’s was concerned, book orders were an event students eagerly anticipated. Receiving books in school generated excitement and Rhino suggests that she and her classmates wanted to talk to each other about that had been purchased for them. Although they understood they were meant to keep silent during lessons, Rhino complains that she couldn’t understand why her teacher became angry when students broke this rule. From Rhino’s perspective keeping silent about new books was too much to expect of students, concluding, “It’s not our fault, we’re *kids*.”

DJ also expressed difficulty not talking to others even when he knew silence was what was expected of him. When I asked DJ to tell me what he was good at in school, he immediately responded, “talking,” suggesting that his teachers would agree, and predicting that if asked, they would characterize him as a “talk boy.” DJ perceived that his talkative nature was problematic, due to adults’ regulation of students’ voices at school.

DJ: Well, talking is not good to do in school. Especially when the teacher’s talking and you know that she’s mean and she will scream at you....

Krista: So are you ever afraid you're gonna get in trouble when you talk when the teacher's talking?

DJ: I do! I get in trouble 'cause she do catches us, 'cause I'm not aware of her.

She has a way, it's almost like she has eyes in the back of her head.

Krista: Tell me what you mean when you say, DJ, that you're, "not aware of her."

DJ: I'm talking to somebody else on the side while she's showing us something on the board, so I'm still talking...and then she will say, "Oh! Is somebody talking?" and, "I think I already know who it is!" (DJ imitates his female teacher by raising the pitch of his voice.) So, I am talking, I am talking and *then* I'm seeing, and then I stop! Once she turns back around, I talk again, and then after that *she* would turn around and be like, "DJ!"

Although DJ explains that he knew talking during his teacher's lessons was "not good," or violated classroom rules, DJ acknowledges he did so anyway. He found the urge to speak with his classmates so strong that his response suggests powerlessness. He stated, for example, "I just can't *help* from sharing it!" Monét shared DJ's outlook. She described deliberately breaking a school bus limiting conversation to talk between seat mates only because, as she explained, "of course, like kids are gonna talk across, [the seats] 'cause if you sit by yourself it's pretty boring."

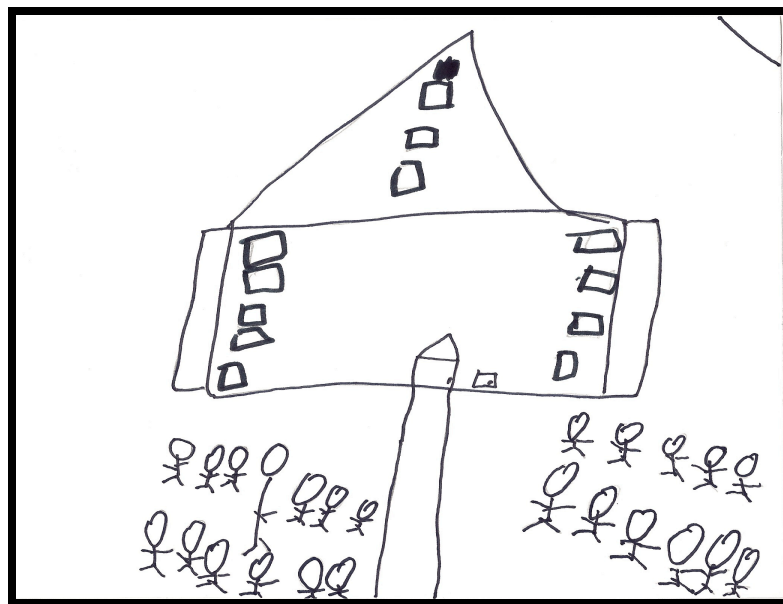
Sade described being sent from her class for talking during a lesson at a time she knew her teacher expected students to remain silent. Prior to the excerpt below, I asked Sade to describe what she was drawing (see Figure 8).

Sade: My friends.

Krista: Oh, okay. You have a lot, it looks like. And can you tell me who that [tall] person is? (Points.)

Sade: (Grins.) Me....

Figure 8. Sade's school drawing.



Krista: Okay. (Sade continues drawing.) Has there ever been a time when you wanted to say something to one of your teachers, but you were afraid to?

Sade: Nope. (Pause.) Can you record the thing that we did just now? Not like what we did *now*. When you were just talking now, the thing that we did?

Krista: You want me to play it back? (Sade nods. I turn off the tape, rewind it and replay it for her.)

Sade: Oh! The thing that you said! That [question], “what do you want to say to your teacher?” I wanted to say, “You’re kind of stupid! Because, I don’t really like you.” And I wanted to slap her, but I didn’t, when I got sent out the room, I wanted to rip the paper, the name of the paper but I *couldn’t*!

Krista: Why did you get sent out of the room? (Sade shows me her drawing.)

Yeah.

Sade: Hi, Princess! (Sade speaks to one of her “pet” snails.)

Krista: What made you get sent out of the room?

Sade: ‘Cause, every time I talk out loud, she says, “Oh, go outside!”

Krista: And what happens when you go outside [the classroom]?

Sade: (Grins.) I just talk by myself!

As she listened to a section of our interview played back, Sade switched gears from wanting to listen to herself on the tape recorder (something she asked to do during nearly all our conversations), to wanting to share her thoughts about the question I’d asked. In telling her story, Sade recounted an experience in which, from her perspective, refusing to keep silent in class resulted in her being sent out of the classroom. Sade’s transcript indicates she felt resentment about the incident. She mentions wanting to “slap” her teacher, for example, and states she wanted to rip up her paper. Despite her apparent frustration, Sade found one aspect of her teacher’s punishment beneficial. Sade admitted she used her exile from the classroom as an opportunity to talk to herself.

Talk in school, as these students' transcripts bear out is an activity largely regulated by adults (A. D. Edwards & Furlong, 1978; Shor, 1980). Rihanna's account provides an unusual example of how voice was regulated in one classroom. Stories from Sade, DJ, and Rhino point to a more typical experience. Socializing with friends was cited in Chapter Five as one of the most valued aspects of the school experience as far as my participants were concerned. Despite students' interest in interacting with peers, traditionally, students' academic development is privileged over their social development, despite the fact that these spheres are intertwined (Chesley, 2007), and despite arguments demonstrating that socialization facilitates, rather than impedes, student learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The students' desire to talk to their friends is also problematic because it conflicts with their teachers' need to teach. My participants' perception was that this conflict was manifested in the form of punishment for talking.

From the students' perspective, talking to friends in class was unavoidable, and breaking teachers' rules governing talk at school was necessary. The students' experienced this conflict externally not internally. None of the children drew connections, for example, between their decision to talk with their classmates during lessons and the possible personal repercussions of missing out on instruction. When DJ admitted it was "hard" not to talk in class during his teacher's lessons he was referring to the difficulty of not sharing with his classmate. He wasn't concerned with what he himself might not be able to do as a result of not listening during instruction. He, like many others, concentrated on the likelihood that talking to peers during instruction would lead to

trouble with teachers. The most commonly mentioned punishments for breaking the rules governing talk were reprimands from teachers and being sent out of the classroom. The latter punishment seems at best to be a solution of convenience. Valuable instructional time is lost whether students are chatting during lessons or sent outside the classroom to talk by themselves (in Sade's case) with fellow troublemakers (in Monét's case) or simply sit in isolation in the hallway while instruction continues in the classroom.

In addition to students' descriptions of how voice was regulated in school, transcripts also shed light on the way students saw silence as an ironic means of expressing voice at school. In the following excerpt, I asked Lola to clarify what she meant when she told me that having personal belongings stolen made her feel "mad on the inside but not on the outside."

Lola: What I meant was I was mad inside my body, but I wasn't mad *outside* of my body. So, the face that I do when I'm mad is like, I'll put one eyebrow up and the other down and if I'm not mad, I'll try to leave my eyebrow down. But the thing is, if I try doing that, it will go right back up. So, I have to try [to] stop doing the anger part! Sometimes I just look at them, stare at them, and say, "Why did you take our crayfish?" And I don't know who stole my Sponge Bob pencil, so I'm still figuring who stole it, and I'm still upset of why would they steal my Sponge Bob pencil.

Krista: Why not just let people see that you're mad when they take things that belong to you, why do you keep it in?

Lola: The reason why I keep it in is because when they see a person mad, they will tell the teacher that that person is mad. I wouldn't *want* them to tell the teacher that I'm mad, [so] I would just like to keep it in.

Lola's transcript makes it clear that she was angry about having her special pencil stolen, but she refused to acknowledge her frustration verbally. Instead, she describes trying to mask her emotions (or at least the facial expressions that reflected them) because she didn't want her classmates to tell her teacher she was angry. Ironically, keeping silent was one way for Lola to feel she was exercising voice. In choosing to mask her feelings about her stolen pencil and her group's stolen crayfish Lola ensured she wouldn't have to talk through the incident with her teacher if she didn't want to.

Schultz (2003) describes situations in which students deliberately silence themselves in efforts to maintain popularity or to avoid saying something that would put them on the outside. She argues for teachers to listen deliberately to "the silences or silencing moves that prevent students from stating their own perspectives and contributing to a diverse and challenging classroom community" (p. 118). Oftentimes, these silencing moves come as a result of traditional modes of instruction and schooling cast children in the exclusive role of listeners, but as Schultz indicates, children often self-silence based on their desire to avoid conflict, or fit in with peers.

A description from one of the small group interviews echoes Lola's decision to keep silent, and mask her true feelings. The discussion below demonstrates that the act of

keeping silent was, for some students, a way for them to express in private what they couldn't or wouldn't express openly.

Sade: Is this thing on, should I just say it?....The thing I'm afraid to say to my teacher is, that sometimes I get sent out of the room, and I feel like saying it outside but-

Rihanna: (Interrupting.) Saying *what* outside?

Sade: The S-word.

Rihanna: Ohh!

Krista: Okay, yeah. And why *don't* you say what you, in one part of yourself, want to say? What keeps you from saying that?

Sade: I have to. Or, I just want to say it in my head.

Rihanna: In your *head*? (She and DJ begin to giggle.)

Krista: (Clarifying.) Well, because your thoughts are the one thing—

Rihanna: (Interrupts.) That tells you what to, what you should do, but sometimes you don't listen!

DJ: No! No, it's like your secret!

Krista: Yeah? Say that again?

DJ: Your thought is your secret, so...you can say something, but you're not saying it out *loud*, so nobody can hear it besides you.

Rihanna: And your brain!

Sade: And God.

Tashala: It's like a little diary!

Rihanna: Yeah! It's like a diary that gets stuck in your head.

DJ: Although it doesn't have a book or nuthin' like that.

Tashala: All you do is just all the pages in there....There's no hard cover book...you just put your head up, and open it and put the pages in!

Both Lola's transcript and the excerpt presented above from one of my small group interviews suggest that students found silence to be one tool available to them to express their voices at school. As far as my participants were concerned, thoughts were private, and the students believed they could say in their thoughts what they were unwilling to say out loud. Orner (1992), states, "there may be compelling conscious and unconscious reasons for not speaking—or for speaking perhaps more loudly with silence" (p. 81). I maintain these participants' decision to keep silent seems to be motivated by a desire to avoid conflict rather than as deliberate acts of resistance. I make this interpretation somewhat gingerly, as Roberts (2000) cautions that the silence of persons of color is often misinterpreted, and that distinguishing between silencing (as oppression) and remaining silent as a form of resistance is difficult (p. 928).

As will become clear, when some of my participants believed they'd been misunderstood, mistreated, or simply unheard, fear of adults' potential reactions kept them from speaking up or defending themselves. The following story from Tashala shows how her confusion over a teacher's instructions led to conflict in the classroom.

Tashala perceived she was punished for talking back to her teacher, when talking back was not what Tashala was intending to do.

Tashala: Okay, this is third grade. I used to be bad, bad, bad when I first started third grade. So, it was this time when my friend she was showing what she did over the summer, and she had these pictures, but I had gone to the bathroom, so I didn't know the teacher said, "Sit down, don't get up" [to the class]. And so, the teacher had the picture[s], so I went up to my teacher when I came from the bathroom. I said, "Can I see the pictures?" She quickly yells at me. So she yells at me! She say[s], "Go sit down!" And then I went to go sit down, and then she says, "Tashala, I'm going to call your mom today. This is unbelievable behavior!" And that's when I said, "But I was just trying to see the pictures." And then she was like, "Do *not* talk when I'm talking." And then she got me confused, because after that she was talking and she said, "Answer me!" And then I said, "But you said not to talk." And then she said, "Why are you talking? Didn't I say don't talk when I'm talking?"

Tashala begins her story by explaining that she was in the restroom when her teacher told the class to remain seated and silent. Upon her return, and having missed her teacher's instruction, Tashala left her seat to look at her friend's photos. Tashala explained that this was the decision that created conflict with her teacher. Tashala stated her teacher characterized her behavior (leaving her seat) as "unbelievable," and worthy of parental notification. Tashala admitted becoming "confused" by her teacher's directions.

From her point of view, just after her teacher told Tashala *not* to talk, she then demanded that Tashala answer her. Tashala became confused because of what she perceived of as a contradiction in her teacher's instructions. In commenting on her story, Tashala later mentioned being so upset over this incident that she faked being sick in order to go to the school nurse. From the nurse's office Tashala called her mother to convince her to come to school and take her home.

It would be easy to assume that direct requests, such as the ones Tashala quoted her teacher as having made ("Do *not* talk when I'm talking," and "Answer me!") would be easily, and perhaps immediately, understood by a third grade student. However, research shows that students' knowledge of and facility with directives develops throughout their elementary school years (Liebling, 1988). Children are, in fact, continually learning the intricacies of language, acquiring competence with increasingly sophisticated features such as sarcasm (Capelli, Nakagawa, & Madden, 1990), irony (Glenwright & Pexman, 2010), and humor (Bergen, 2007). Scholars have argued for decades that misunderstandings in communication between adults and children are, in fact, common (Borthwick, 1986; Collins & Seidman, 1980).

Differences in power, agency, and control among teachers and students further complicate communication between teachers and their students (Gordon, et al., 2000). It is possible, given Tashala's description of her previous trouble in class ("I used to be bad, bad, bad"), that her teacher presumed Tashala was intentionally being sarcastic or defiant. Shor (1980) argues, for instance, that when teachers' begin to perceive students' talk as

“too rebellious, the teacher may consider the student a troublemaker” (p. 88). Undoing such labels may be very difficult once established. Tashala maintained that she was genuinely confused about whether she was expected to keep silent or answer her teacher. Given Tashala’s comfort in characterizing to her prior “bad” behavior it seems reasonable that if she’d intentionally acted in a deliberately defiant or even sarcastic manner she’d have admitted as much during our interview.

Other students also found it difficult to verbally defend themselves in front of teachers, Monét, for example, recounted an incident in which her teacher sent Monét and another student out of the classroom because the teacher felt the two girls had violated rules prohibiting talking during instruction.

And my teacher was like....she was yelling at us, me and my friend. And so she’s like, “Oh, guys do you think you need to leave?” And so we left out in the hallway, and I’m like, “Well, why wouldn’t she separate us, if we were having trouble together?” And then afterwards, she finished teaching the lesson, [and] she came she out and she [was] like, “Well, you guys, you know that was bad” and all that stuff. We were like, “Yes, we know.” And then this girl she was like, “Well, I sometimes laugh uncontrollably.” And I’m like, “Yeah!” And then she [the teacher] was like, Monét, “What do you have to say?” And I was like, “I didn’t do anything. It was her.” And she was like, “Well, then why didn’t you tell me that?” And I was like, (Monét drops her voice to a whisper.) “[Be]cause you *made* me come out!”

Monét explained that her teacher questioned why Monét hadn't told her she wasn't talking when she directed the girls to leave the classroom. Monét believed she was innocent of breaking her teacher's rules, but from Monét's point of view, she left the classroom without protest because her teacher (using an implied directive) told the girls to leave the room. Arguing with her teacher wasn't something Monét considered, a fact she emphasizes in the last line of her narrative, "[Be]cause you *made* me come out!"

During a small group conversation, Rihanna described her reluctance to speak to her teacher about an issue on the playground that had upset her.

Rihanna: I never try to! I never tell her, but [because] I'm so scared.

Krista: Why? What makes you afraid?

Rihanna: 'Cause, I'm like, I don't know what's gonna happen, if she's gonna start talking to the kids, and then the kids maybe gonna tell the principal like last time.

Here, Rihanna describes not a fear of her teacher, but her concern that talking openly with teacher would lead to more conflicts rather than peaceful resolutions. Rihanna expresses her concern that if she attempted to address the issue her teacher might respond by revealing what Rihanna shared with the rest of her classmates. Rihanna then wondered aloud whether her peers would, in turn, inform the school's principal about the incident, a turn of events that had taken place previously. Concerns about privacy and fears about potential conflicts led Rihanna to keep silent about something that mattered to her.

The following excerpt from Snake suggests he wanted his teachers to keep certain issues confidential, but Snake argues confidentiality was not routinely extended to students at his school.

Snake: See, my teacher's very strict....She likes to give us a lot of homework, and she likes to give us a lot of homework. And if someone does something to get in trouble, she'll tell her friends, or the teacher that's next door. She would tell her everything we do. Like if we do something that's only like between the teacher and ourselves? She would tell other teachers. And most of the teachers in my school do that.

Krista: How do you know that they talk about you? Have you ever heard them?

Snake: Yeah.

Krista: Really! Tell me about that, what did you hear?

Snake: One time, I took the State Test and then they told me to take it over again and then they didn't tell me my grade and then one time I heard Miss Bird and this other teacher that's right next to my class and Miss Dahl, she told Miss Bird that I had did *worse* than I did before.

Krista: Wow. How did that make you feel when you realized your teacher was telling another teacher?

Snake: Kinda angry. And that's why most of the teachers do [it]. They don't really [like] keeping stuff to themselves, and one time...I went to the office because they were going outside and I had nowhere else to go, 'cause I still doing

my homework. So, I went to the office to finish my homework and one of my friends went to the other room that was right beside me, because he got in trouble during social studies (K: Mm, hmm.) and then the social studies teacher, she was out telling other teachers and then Miss Bird was yellin' at my friend and then this other teacher asked what was happening. So they...like tell the other teachers and stuff and other teachers want to know.

Krista: Have you ever, have you ever asked your teacher to keep what happens in the classroom private?

Snake: No.

Krista: What do you think your teacher would say if you ask her to do that?

Snake: I don't know, she probably still does it.

Krista: [O]kay. Do kids talk about their teachers?

Snake: (Grins.) Mostly, yes.

Krista: Mostly, yes? (Laughing.) What kind of things do you talk about?

Snake: Like, if we get in trouble, [we] talk about what actually happened.

As far as Snake was concerned, his teacher shared information he believed was confidential with her colleague. Snake believed his poor test score should have been a private matter between him and his teacher. In his account, Snake expressed his concern about overhearing his teacher talking to another adult about his test performance. Snake also expresses the belief that if he asked his teacher to keep his test results private she was unlikely to comply with his request. Although Snake admitted that he and his

classmates routinely talked about teachers, he states that they did so for different purposes. Snake viewed his teacher's conversation about his test results as a betrayal of trust. The kind of conversations he and his peers had about teachers, was different as far as he was concerned. Snake stated he and his classmates talked about teachers as part of an effort explain their perspectives on why or perhaps how they got into trouble "Like, if we get in trouble, [we] talk about what actually happened." Snake's description suggests his talk with friends was not at all like the test performance gossip he overheard from teachers, but clarification among classmates.

The transcripts above highlight the students' perceptions that talking back (hooks, 1989) was a difficult undertaking for participants, and it is evident that most participants were either uncomfortable or unwilling to attempt talking back at school. Shor (1980) warns that for students, "there are tense rules and high prices to pay for talking" (p. 81). My participants stories suggest that they experienced a tension between their desire to be heard and the consequences they perceived might follow a decision to speak out. In most cases, the potential personal satisfaction for having their say was not worth the risk of enduring punishment at school. Since school is typically a place where students' are taught when to speak and what to speak about, and given the time devoted to evaluating what students do or do not say (A. D. Edwards & Furlong, 1978), participants' reluctance to voice their opinions is understandable.

I began this section on voice lessons at school with an account from Rihanna that stood out for its uncharacteristic quality. I've chosen to conclude this section by

highlighting another very unique student account. In the excerpt that follows, I showcase Zariah's description of how she chose to respond to her teacher's unpopular decision.

Zariah: My third grade teacher, she didn't even let me put syrup on my pancakes.

Krista: What do you mean she didn't let you put syrup on your pancakes?

Zariah: Because when [or] if we had a waffle or pancakes or French toast sticks for breakfast, she wouldn't let us use the syrup.

Krista: Why?

Zariah: She said it would get the desks all messy.

Krista: How did that make you feel?

Zariah: Mad.

Krista: Did you ever tell her?

Zariah: And I tried to boycott it. I said, "Okay, if she doesn't let us get syrup, how 'bout we just stop eating pancakes?" She just didn't send up any pancakes anymore. That's what she did.

Krista: (Clarifying.) So you tried to boycott it?

Zariah: Yes.

Krista: And your teacher just told the cafeteria don't send pancakes anymore to my classroom?

Zariah: (Nods.) So every day...the rest of the school got pancakes and stuff like that...[and] we got cereal.

Krista: How did that make you feel when you guys started getting cereal instead of pancakes?

Zariah: Mad.

Krista: Mm, hmm. (Pause.) So who won?

Zariah: The teacher.

From Zariah's perspective, a boycott was needed because her teacher was preventing them from having the choice of using syrup on their breakfast pancakes. According to Zariah, the teacher wouldn't allow the children to use syrup because it made the students' desks "messy." Planning a boycott and soliciting the cooperation of her classmates became a way for Zariah and her peers to "have a say" in response to a classroom policy that they found unfair. Zariah's excerpt stands out as a dramatic example of exercising voice in school, but the boycott was ultimately unsuccessful. Zariah and I acknowledged the failure of the exercise when I asked her who had "won." In this instance, Zariah's teacher dealt with the students' boycott by telling the cafeteria to replace pancakes with cold cereal.

In Zariah's case, talking back may have led her and her classmates to feel liberated initially, but as our interview confirmed, in the battle over breakfast, it was the teacher, not the students that emerged victorious. Accounts from Rihanna, Monét, and Snake demonstrate that talking back (hooks, 1989) is a practice most students would rather avoid altogether. Transcripts suggest that several participants feared defending themselves, or expressing their opinions would lead to unpleasant consequences.

Voice Lessons from the Research Process

As one of our interviews drew to a close, I asked Powers if there was anything else he wanted to say before I turned off the tape recorder. Leaning in, lips hovering over tape recorder's built-in microphone, he announced, "There's a whole lot more I gotta say." Powers and I participated in the same interview, and yet our interpretations of the event were very different. I was certain our interview had run its course, while Powers believed things were just getting started. Our different perspectives, about the same interview, highlight the challenge of placing student voice at the center of the research process. I believe sharing the successes alongside the challenges is important because rarely do researcher acknowledge the difficulties they encounter during the research process. Desai (2006) for instance argues that, "research reports are sanitized, they rarely provide insights into the messiness of data analysis" (p. 6). Although Desai was speaking about data analysis specifically, I'd argue the same case can be made for researchers' reporting of data collection as well.

There is evidence that interviews served as a means of eliciting student voice and several children stated they appreciated being able to speak about what they experienced at school. Showing participants their interview transcripts, for example, served as a powerful reminder that their insights on school would be shared with others. During second interviews, I presented students with copies of transcripts from our first interview conversations. The children reviewed their transcripts and I asked them to tell me what they thought. The students commented on a number of things. Streets laughed when he

saw the spelling of my first name. He chuckled, “Your name begins with a K?” Streets also wondered about the process of transcription, asking me, “how do you remember it?” and “doesn’t it take you a long time?” DJ was also interested in the transcribing work itself, but took time to first confirm that I was responsible for the effort. He asked, “You actually *did* all this?” DJ said he thought seeing his interview in print was “amazing,” and he marveled that the transcribing, “must’ve took a whole day!” Rhino and Tommy were nearly rendered speechless by their transcripts. The two spent such a long pouring over their transcripts I worried I would have to interrupt them and set the transcripts aside so I would be able to complete our interviews. Neither Tommy nor Rhino said much in response to reading their transcripts, but it was obvious that they found them extremely interesting.

Tashala giggled over her transcript observing, “If I had a punishment to write five hundred words...I wouldn’t even have to *do* the punishment, ‘cause I did it already by talking to somebody!” Tashala mentioned that she thought it was fun, “to see how much words you say,” typed up and printed out. Rihanna and Sade both spoke about what they believed their mother’s reactions might be to their transcripts. As she looked over her transcript, Rihanna gushed, “Oh! That’s a lot! I didn’t think that there [was] more. I talked a lot! It’s wonderful.” Rihanna urged me, “You have to show my mommy!” A moment later, however, Rihanna reconsidered this and warned me instead, “No...don’t!”

Sade, on the other hand, wasn’t about to reconsider. The excerpt below reveals why she thought her transcript ought to be shared with her mother.

Sade: (Turning the pages of the transcript.) Wait, wait, wait, wait, this does not sound good to me! This is not right!

Krista: What do you mean, it's not right?

Sade: (Grins.) Nothing! I'm just joking.

Krista: Oh...(Sade returns to reading the transcript.) You're smiling, what makes you smile like that? Seeing this?

Sade: (Softly.) That surprised me.

Krista: What surprised you about it?

Sade: Whoa, oh, no! (Sade starts laughing.)

Krista: You did so well the first time. Tell me what surprises you about seeing all your words like that?

Sade: If my mom just saw that, she would've been crying right now. Like, when my uncle died, he had a heart attack [and] my mom started crying when I was holding her. She started crying.

Krista: So what would make your mom cry seeing your words like that?

Sade: 'Cause she doesn't know I talk that much.

Sade's interview excerpt and the short quotes from other students highlight the interest the children had in seeing their voice recast in the form of an interview transcript. I believe these data suggest that the study benefitted the participants to a degree. Not only did the children receive a tangible acknowledgement of their participation (a movie theatre gift card), each child understood that what they shared with me would be shared

with others, as I disseminated some of their school knowledge, presented in the form of a dissertation, and as I shared with the children perhaps in the form of journal articles that would be read by many more people. Beyond the potential for their insights to be shared with a wider audience, some children, like Rihanna believed there were individual benefits to their participation beyond the thank you gift they received at the conclusion of the study. I share Rihanna's quote because, unlike the informal acknowledgements made by others, Rihanna spoke about her impressions of the study during one of our final conversations together. She explained, "I think that it's actually good that you have interviews, because you get to talk to a person, express your feelings...I thought it was a great idea." Despite the difficulties of elevating student voice, and the occasional missteps I made in pursuit of that goal, participation comments suggest that participation in this study was rewarding because it provided a platform for them to voice their opinions and share their experiences.

During one of the focus group interviews, students drew comparisons with the ways they experienced voice in this study and in school. Joy selected a question card and introduced a new question to the group.

Joy: (Reading.) Okay. "What's the hardest thing about being a kid in school and why?"

Monét: You don't get to speak your ideas when you want!....You don't get to speak like your ideas...Okay, this is a complete lie, because I *really* like this thing that we're thing that we're doing, [but] say I hated this thing, and then my mom

was like, “No! You have to do it” then I can’t speak my ideas....Like, grown ups kind of overpower you.

Joy: Oh, I *know*!....When you’re at school, and like, I’m just pretending, okay?

This is *not* true. Like if you hate your teacher, you can’t tell ‘em that you hate your teacher! You have to “like” them. You can’t say it.

Krista: Okay, so not only do they overpower you, but what I hear you saying is you can’t-

Zariah: (Interrupting.) Say what you want to say....Or you’ll get in trouble or something by your parents.

Monét: (Nods.) Yeah, that’s right.

In this excerpt, the girls contrast the freedom they felt to speak their ideas during interviews, with the suppression they felt in other contexts, including school. Monét mentions that she “really like[s] this thing that we’re doing,” and bemoans the fact that, from her perspective, “grown-ups kind of overpower” children. Joy agrees with Monét’s assertion, adding that she found it frustrating she couldn’t say what she wanted to say in school, but had to pretend to “like” her teachers. Zariah argues as far as she was concerned speaking your mind carried with it the threat of punishment. The girls’ responses suggest that, in contrast to our interviews, where speaking freely was encouraged, conversations with other adults had to be handled with some care. Even refusing to participate in an interview was a right guaranteed for every child. When students didn’t want to be interviewed, there were no penalties. They weren’t scolded,

notes were not sent home, and I made a conscious effort to avoid expressing any outward signs of disappointment or disapproval. When rescheduling became necessary, I simply pulled out my calendar, asked participants which day or time would work better for them, and then penciled in a new interview appointment.

Monét, Zariah, and Joy argued that adults, from their perspective, overpowered children. Generally speaking, I believe the majority of my conversations with participants were as egalitarian as was possible. Throughout this study, students demonstrated their appreciation that they could exercise choice in the research process. Oftentimes, this right to make independent choices was manifested in students' choosing to opt out of answering a question, and in other cases, students chose to end the interview entirely. Alyssa made sure to clarify her expectations in regard to her desire to conclude our interview, "We only have one more question? [Be]cause I really want to use the computer." Alyssa made clear her preference was to use TLC's computers rather than to continue our conversation. I had hoped to ask her several more questions, but I didn't force her to continue our interview beyond the length of time she deemed was appropriate. Sade surprised me by walking up to me one afternoon, as I was about to exit TLC, asking me to conduct an unscheduled interview with her. In the following segment, she explains why she insisted I interview her again.

Sade: [Be]cause last time I didn't...you get to interview me, that's why. And, that's all.

Krista: Okay. I asked a lot of questions last time, but you want to look and see if there's maybe something you want to talk a little bit more about today?

Sade: (Looks over the interview protocol and makes a disgusted face.) Eeeh! I like my own questions! My *own* question is why does everybody get, why does the teenagers get out of school so early instead of us? *That's* my question for you! (Turns microphone toward me pushing it close to my face.)

Sade was dissatisfied by the question choices on the interview protocol, so she designed her own question and put me in the position of answering her. In doing so, Sade stepped out of her prescribed role and into a role she chose for herself: researcher. And in fact, many of the children, albeit at my invitation asked me questions or suggested alternate conversation topics.

Rhino was also dissatisfied with my interview protocol. After I invited her to choose a question from the protocol for further discussion, she chose instead to circumvent my protocol to act as a narrator for a story she found more interesting than her schooling experiences.

Rhino: Hey, can I tell you about? Does it have to be about a question on here?

Krista: No...do you have a story in mind? Tell me.

Rhino: Yeah. I have two stories (Giggles.) But we used to have two dogs. It was a Pitbull and a Chihuahua. The Pitbull was mine and the Chihuahua was my cousin's. Well one day my cousin was over and she had fetched a stick to my Pitbull and my Pitbull got made, because my Pitbull is an evil dog. 'Cause, and it

was really sad. Oh wait...oh, yeah! And then he fetched them and the stick hit him in the head, and then he got mad and he got back up, and like saliva was coming out of his teeth and everything, and he got mad and chased my cousin down the street and at the end when my cousin couldn't run anymore, he cached (sic) up to him and bit him on the thigh and ripped half of his thigh off, it was disgusting.

Krista: Oh, wow.

Rhino: Yeah, and then he had to get about eleven to ten stitches, and he got mad at my dog and then his mom, they gave his mom two things: "Would you like the dog to go to another house or to put him to sleep." And she choose [sic] to put him to sleep and then I never talked to her again. Ever. 'Cause it was my dog, my beautiful dog... he, he loved me, I loved him. He was like my little angel. And then I got another dog, and then that dog died for, because the doctor had put the medicine, too much in and then choked him by an accident. And then, well, that and he wasn't supposed to get scared after he took his pill. And it was at night and there was a mouse this long in the Dominican Republic. (Gestures.) It was like, the nose was up here (Wiggles her thumb) and the tail was down here (Points to her elbow). And the body was like about this long, and she got scared and he had a heart attack, and then I got another doggy that had labor this month. It was two weeks ago and she had six babies.

Rhino's stories about her Pitbull were outside the scope of my dissertation, in the sense that the stories had nothing to do with her schooling experiences. I could, therefore, have discouraged her from telling me these stories, since she asked whether she had to respond to the questions on the interview protocol. I invited Rhino to share her stories about her dogs in an effort to give voice to a subject that mattered to her. A review of transcripts demonstrates that I was not always accommodating to participants' requests however, as I explain in further detail below.

I have chosen to feature drawings and interview excerpts from conversations with Baller and Rihanna in order to demonstrate how student voice was both elicited and suppressed in the course of this study. I begin with a pair of drawings created by Baller. I have purposefully presented these drawings side by side rather one at a time so that comparisons between Figures 9 and 10 can more easily be made.

As I did with all the children, during our first interview I asked Baller to choose between drawing a picture of his school or his classroom. Baller agreed to draw his school with some degree of reluctance. His school drawing appears above and on the left. Using pencil, he quickly sketched his school building, focusing on the parking lot (represented by a series of squares with the letter P written inside them) traffic signs, and the semi-circular bus lane in front of his school. When I initially asked Baller to create a drawing of his school, I set out a large bag full of markers for him to color his picture. When he finished his drawing, Baller informed me he was finished, and that he "[did] not want to use marker." Instead of coloring in the school building, trees and the wide

expanse of grass in front of his school, Baller hastily scribbled in shading for the trees and grass, leaving the school building a blank space.

Figure 9. Baller's school drawing.

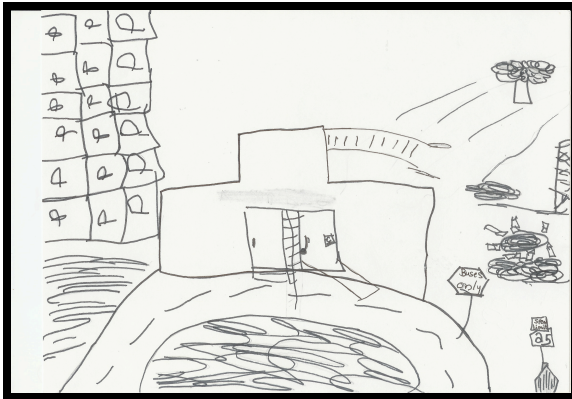
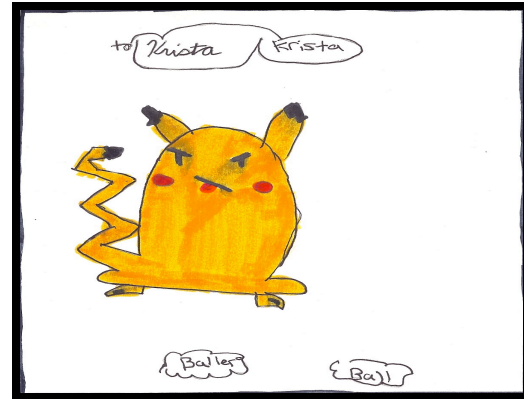


Figure 10. Baller's Pikachu drawing.



While Baller was uninterested in adding color to complete his school sketch, before our interview concluded, he surprised me by insisting that he wanted to draw a second picture for me, as the excerpt below details.

Baller: But before I leave, I want to make something for you! I need a piece of paper. [I give him a sheet of lined paper from my field notebook.]

Krista: There.

Baller: [Pushes the lined paper aside, and picks up a small piece of unlined paper from beneath my notebook.] Wait, is this important?....Wait, can I draw something behind here since there's nothing on it?... It's really cool. And it's a character from Pokemo[n]....A character that I like a lot.

Krista: What's the name of the character?

Baller: Pikachu...And I can draw him really good.

Krista: Pikachu's the one's that the hamster right? Or, he looks like a hamster?

Baller: He looks like one, but he's like electric, fire, something.

Krista: I might be thinking of Hamtaro. [but] that's another character...Oh! That's right, and this guy's bright yellow, right?

Baller: [O]kay....done with that! Can I put a tongue? His tongue sticking out?

Krista: It's your picture.

Baller: But I just want to know.

Krista: I don't mind if his tongue is sticking out.

Baller: [O]kay. I need red, so I can make his tongue. Then, his cheeks are red.

And, [Pauses as he colors the picture.] *now* yellow. Oh, I need [the] black one more time. 'Kay, now yellow. [my] next rotation is gym. Then probably-

Krista: I think you're right.

Baller: Yeah, 'cause it goes: game room, then gym, then it might be art, but I might leave before art, maybe. 'Cause sometimes I leave during gym.

Krista: [You] get picked up a little earlier?

Baller: Yeah, 'cause my mom...she goes to work on Mondays early. 'Cause she has to do classes. How good does my Pikachu look so far?

Krista: I think it looks terrific. How good do you think it looks?

Baller: [Grins.] *Awesome!*

Baller's Pikachu picture, which appears to the right of Baller's school drawing, was an opportunity for him to express his voice in our interview to a much greater degree than the picture I asked him to draw. As a result, Baller didn't just *draw* the Pikachu character. He carefully sketched, colored, and added a facial expression for the character's face. He also added a dedication to the top of the drawing, and signed his pseudonym at the bottom. Baller wrote in both print and cursive, despite the fact he had told me cursive was hard for him. Although I didn't time him, Baller spent a great deal longer working on his Pikachu picture than on his school drawing. Baller willingly labored over the completion of his Pikachu drawing, even though he recognized that he would miss some of his favorite activities at TLC due to his early Monday evening pickup time. I doubt he would have been willing to miss time in gym in order to complete his school picture. Drawing Pikachu simply mattered more to Baller than drawing either his school or his classroom.

Rihanna's drawing demonstrates my attempt to give participants a "choice" of drawing either their school or their classroom was, in actuality, more of a constraint. In our first interview, Rihanna asked for clarification about the drawing I had asked her to create.

Rihanna: Oh, I get to draw anything?

Krista: Yes [your] school or classroom.

Rihanna: That's my only two choices?

Krista: Those are, unfortunately. Yes. What do you think you're gonna draw?

Rihanna: My school.

Krista: You're going to draw your school?

Rihanna: *Part* of my school.

Rihanna wanted to draw, but she was dismayed by the fact that her “only two choices” consisted of pictures of her school or her classroom. Rihanna complied with my request, but she exercised voice in her declaration that she would only draw “*part* of [her] school.” She chose to focus the majority of her attention on the things that mattered to her, most notably the brightly colored playground at the top center of her picture.

Rihanna added details to her picture including a large red swing that she explained was like a specialized swing at for use by children with physical handicaps. In contrast to the details of the playground scene, the school building is represented by a simple brown rectangle with two gray doors. The only other details are two small gray windows that Rihanna mentioned were where the principal's office was located. Rihanna added the tree and flowers to her drawing because she stated she enjoyed drawing those things.

Rihanna asked if drawing her school or classroom were her only choices. I told her that, “unfortunately” they were, but this wasn't the case. I could easily have encouraged Rihanna to draw whatever she chose to, with the proviso that what she drew had a connection to a school memory or story she wanted to share with me. Concerns about getting data I could use prevented me from providing students with a greater degree of control over the subjects they chose for their drawings. In hindsight, I believe at the time I assumed drawings like Baller's Pikachu character were simply cute pictures

without any real significance to my research study. A conversation with Baller during our last interview forced me, at least partially, to reconsider that idea. I asked Baller if he remembered the picture he had drawn for me. When I posed the question, I was referring to his “school” picture, but Baller remembered his other drawing.

Figure 11. Rihanna’s school drawing.



B: The one was the Pikachu one.

K: Yeah, yeah, I still have that.

B: I don't know the other one.

K: You...drew me a picture of your school.

B: Oh! My school.

K: But the, the Pikachu's my favorite....

B: I like it too, that's why I like drawing it- I won the contest for best picture on [my school's] A Plus magazine.

K: Oh, you did? When was that?

B: That was a year ago. Two years actually.

K: Tell me about that.

B: It was good, because they want to see, [students'] pictures of how they can draw and all that other stuff? So, I was like, "I don't think I should do it, because I'm not a good drawer, but I know I can draw Pikachu." And that's the only person I know I draw, and then I kept on talking to myself, over and over again. Finally, my sister said, "Just do it, okay?" And then I said, "Okay, I'll do it." And then I just drew a little picture of Pikachu, but this time, I did different versions of him. One [was] purple and black, and [another was] purple and red. Yeah, and that's what they really liked about it, 'cause it was different colors.

Evident in this excerpt is that one reason Baller chose to draw Pikachu was his opinion that he drew the character very well. However, his Pikachu drawing was also relevant to the purposes of our interviews. He associated a specific school memory with the character he drew. Had this exchange with Baller occurred earlier in my study, I would have asked the children to draw whatever they wanted as long as they could connect a specific school experience to their pictures. I think adopting this approach would have enabled me to more successfully use the invited drawings as a means of eliciting student voice.

In a previous section of this chapter I argued that the students considered silence as an ironic means of expressing their voice in school. Silence also emerged as an issue for the students in regards to their participation in this study as well, albeit in different ways. Generally speaking, the students seemed to connect silence with the privacy protections afforded to them as a result of their participation in the study. This makes sense given the amount of attention paid to these matters in both the consent and assent forms and the reminders that I shared with the children at various times during the research process. In this final section, I present data that demonstrate the degree to which my participants acted on their right to remain silent during the interview process. During one of my interviews with Sade, I followed up on a discussion we'd had given about a teacher she particularly liked by asking her whether she worked with other teachers during the school day.

Sade: Yeah, but they're not my favorite.

Krista: Why aren't they your favorite? Tell me about that.

Sade: They are, but...

Krista: It's okay...I'm not gonna tell your teachers. If they're not your favorite, you can tell me.

Sade: They're not!

Krista: Okay, tell me why.

Sade: They're mean!

Krista: How are they mean? What do they do?

Sade: They always want to be mean to me 'cause I do, I do things I'm not supposed to do.

Sade was reluctant to talk about her other teachers before I assured her I wouldn't share what she told me with her teachers. After hearing that reminder, Sade explained that the other teachers she worked with were not her "favorite," because she believed they were "mean" to her. Our exchange demonstrates that children participating in student voice research endeavors sometimes need reassurance that their participation will come with privacy protections.

The children I interviewed weren't always sure whether the voice I wanted to elevate in this study guaranteed them the right to privacy. Of course, I respected, and even encouraged my participants to keep stories to themselves if they desired. Some children signaled that certain subjects were off limits though the use of body language, tone of voice, or even direct refusals. Other children felt it was necessary to ask me for permission to keep certain subjects to themselves. During one of our final interviews, I shared a short list of initial themes with Tashala. She thought for a moment and then stated what she felt needed to be added.

Tashala: What I would add to this list, is when teachers just believe the other person. Because, maybe the teacher may, may think that that person is more honest.

Krista: Okay. Hold on one second, let me get this written down. So what I wrote in very tiny letters [was], "when teachers believe another person because they

may *think* that person is more honest”. Now, that sounds to me like you have a story about that.

Tashala: (Grins.) Uhh.

Krista: Tashala’s smiling! (We both giggle.) Would you like to tell me that story?

Tashala: I have to?

Krista: You don’t have to if you don’t want to. If it makes you uncomfortable you don’t have to tell me *any* story.

Tashala: I don’t want to tell you.

In this case, Tashala had a story to tell, but she wasn’t sure that story was one she wanted to share. She asked me if she has the option to refuse, “I have to?” and when I remind her that she has the right to privacy she quickly seizes upon this stating, “I don’t want to tell you.”

In contrast to Tashala, Kiyyah and Lola didn’t ask whether they had to tell me something, they simply let me know they weren’t going to delve into certain topics. During a conversation about lunchtime happenings, for instance, I asked Kiyyah to tell me more about what she and her friends talked about as they sat together.

Kiyyah: What happened on the weekend, what happened in class...*private* stuff.

Krista: You don’t have to tell me that.

Kiyyah: That’s basically it.

Kiyyah immediately let me know (using body language, and especially through her tone of voice) that my question was, in her opinion, off limits. When I affirmed her right to maintain privacy over our discussion topics, Kiyyah quickly ended a line of conversation I was interested in pursuing. Lola, similarly, wanted to keep a situation between her and her younger sister out of the purview of this study. In response to a question about how she was handling the transition from third to fourth grade, Lola stated:

Lola: It's going good. It's just one thing that I didn't like what my sister did.

Krista: Just one thing that your sister did?

Lola: Yeah. Really sometimes, I don't want to talk about it, 'cause I really don't want to hurt her feelings.

Krista: Oh, I understand. You don't have to tell me anything that you don't want to talk about, Lola. It's your choice.

Lola: Okay.

In the final two excerpts I present examples of participants' understandings of the necessity for using pseudonyms as a form of privacy protection. In the following transcript segment, Powers is in the midst of drawing a picture of his classroom. I informed him that I was going to ask him three more questions before we concluded our interview. I have included the picture Powers drew in order to contextualize Powers' descriptions.

Powers: One. I have three tables, group one, group two, group three, group four.

We're group three. So, it's group three, group two, group one, group five, and group four. Is it okay if I write the names that go on here?

Krista: Not the names of the kids 'cause I won't be able to put their names on them, but why don't you draw...you could draw pictures of the kids or pictures of your teacher.

Powers: Or I can say...what's the person's last name.

Krista: I can't...

Powers: Sorry, what's their last, what's the letter, what does the letter start with?

Krista: I can't even have that, because it wouldn't be protecting their privacy. So can you draw stick figures maybe? Around the tables or something?

Figure 12. Powers' school drawing.



Powers wanted to add his classmate's names to his drawing so that his picture identified which students were seated at particular tables. When I told him he couldn't do that, he asked if he could write his classmates' initials instead, by asking, "What does the letter start with?" Powers idea didn't make me feel comfortable either, and my suggestion "can you draw stick figures..." was met with little enthusiasm. In the end, Powers chose to represent his classmates, and the relative success of the five different table groups by making "tally marks" for the points different groups had earned.

In response to a question about how Monét thought her teachers would describe her, Monét's response demonstrates our conversations about confidentiality were taken very seriously.

Monét: I want to do everything. Like, I want to say, "People do this, do that!" I don't. It's not like I'm a leader in the sense that I tell people what to do and then don't do anything. I wanna tell people, like, say there's like Jim, Carrie, and Doug. (Monét signals to me that these names are pseudonyms by placing "air quotes" around the names with her fingers raised.) And Christina. Carrie is a girl. So Jim, I mean, Tim and Doug they all and me, so I'll say, "Oh, Carrie, work on that penguin, 'cause I know you're really good at drawing penguins. And Doug, work on the boat, 'cause I know you get like, like you know how to do everything. "And, Tim do this, and uh, Christina do this, and Carrie, do that!" But it's not like I'm the kind of person, where I'm like, "Do all this stuff," and then I won't do anything, I'll just sit there and watch. It's like, I'll do all that stuff,

and then, there's something else, so I'll do that. I'll color in the penguin's flag, and you guys do the penguin, and you do the disco ball, and I'll write the words, and then you do this. And I kind of control them where I kind of *want* to do everything...

As Monét answered my question, she took care to maintain the privacy rights of her classmates. She gave each of her group members a pseudonym, indicating the names were false by using the quotation marks gesture prior to speaking the names. The excerpts presented in this section demonstrate my participants' belief that voice and privacy are connected. Regardless of whether the context was the students' classrooms or an interview conversation, the children felt student voice was reflected in children's right to keep certain matters private.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have presented data that bring students' experiences with voice to the forefront. In a departure from previous findings chapters, I have presented transcript excerpts and drawings that relate to the research context rather than just the school context. I believe the inclusion of this material was essential. Ignoring the ways in which voice was both elicited and suppressed in this study would have denied the difficulty of voice research with children.

The children's descriptions about their experiences with voice at school reflect varying degrees of suppression. To be fair, many of the districts where my participants

attended school had, in different ways, attempted to address student voice, particularly through curriculum decisions. The majority of participants' went to schools that used whole language philosophies, emphasizing reading and writing workshop periods and math instruction that promoted collaboration, multiple approaches to solving problems, and the use of manipulatives. The students also spoke about the number of "specials" or classes in art, music, technology, and physical education their schools provided. These efforts are laudable, but as far as my participants were concerned, they weren't, by themselves, enough. Research supports the students' conclusion. Guitierrez-Gomez argues that while children continually acquire new information, curriculum hasn't caught up. She notes, "one challenge for us educators is to find ways to dedicate more thought and effort toward promoting an awareness of children's voices *within* quality curriculum"

Part of the challenge is that, student voice is not often at the center of instruction, and it rarely influences school procedures or policy (Wyngaard, 2005). Students' voices, like the students themselves, are often rendered silent in the day-to-day work of schools. Changing the status quo is fraught with difficulties, because it is contrary to the fundamental nature of schools and schooling. As Wyngaard (2005) observed, "student-centered education as well as current politically influenced research 'best practice' forces a researcher-educator to practice democratic principles within a system based fundamentally on [the] control and management of students" (p. 77).

In order for real improvements to be made in the educational opportunities for all, schools, teachers, and researchers must be persuaded to invest time in listening to

students' voices. Sustained efforts and commitments are required, as isolated acts of listening will not be sufficient to bring about the kinds of changes needed to undo decades of inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes. According to Marland (1994), listening to students' voices must be woven into the educational fabric of every school, present in curricular aims and institutional planning, and contribute in measureable ways to the function and governance of individual schools. Ultimately, listening to student's voices is most successful when the students themselves are encouraged to "reflect on, analyze and express their feelings and concerns" (Marland, 1994, p. 64). It is for these reasons that studies like this one are needed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Implications

In this study, I interviewed sixteen elementary school age children regarding their personal school experiences. My research was guided by the following questions:

- How do culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse children describe their school experiences? What stories do these children tell about school?
- What do these children's descriptions teach us about students' perspectives on school?
- In what way can focusing on these students' school experiences help the field of education improve the educational outcomes for all children, and particularly for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse?

I found many of my participants' stories shared common threads. For example, in Chapter Four I presented data suggesting that students wanted to demonstrate they were "getting it" in school. For some participants, perceived pressure to perform (particularly on the annual State Test) seems to have factored into their adoption of performance goal orientations (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Performance goal orientations pushed children to view learning as a thing to be measured rather than as an ongoing, collaborative process of discovery. Some of my participants were very sensitive about receiving extra academic assistance in school. Although many students felt extra help was beneficial, they also believed it made them targets for being labeled as less capable, or "special."

Pull-out support classes were especially disliked by these students because being taken out of class made them feel they missed out on the “fun” activities their classmates enjoyed and that being pulled outs confirmed their “special” status.

In Chapter Five, I presented common threads culled from students’ stories about their experiences with peers. My participants found peer relationships to be an integral aspect of the experience of school, in part, because the school site offered them multiple locations for establishing and maintaining friendships. The young people I interviewed also cautioned that school served as a setting for experiences with peers that were sometimes quite ugly from their perspective. The teasing episodes many of the children described came with lasting memories, at least for some of the children. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Snake spoke about these episodes as akin to “being marked for life,” for instance. Adult interventions in negative peer exchanges were generally viewed as ineffective and unsatisfying according to my participants. While the children felt peer relationships impacted their overall perspectives on school, research shows that adults typically do not view monitoring these interactions as part of their professional responsibilities (Bryan, et al., 2004).

Data presented in Chapter Six centered on students’ experiences with current and former teachers. There were two main threads for the students’ stories about their teachers: positive impressions and disappointing encounters. Generally speaking, the children appreciated those teachers who rewarded them or connected with them personally. Not only did children want teachers to connect with them as individuals, my

participants spoke warmly and enthusiastically about teachers who gave students a glimpse into their own lives. When participants told stories about negative experiences with their teachers, they focused not on individuals' personalities, but on the actions, words, and/or decisions students found disappointing.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I wove together all my participants' school stories that centered on aspects of voice including speaking, listening and silencing at school. I also presented examples of how voice was elicited and (occasionally) suppressed in this study. Most of the school site "voice lessons" dealt with the children's perspective that talk in school was something controlled by adults. Research supports participants' observations. Shor (1980), for instance, contends that "teachers dissuade students from talking...not only to maintain order but also to maintain the teacher as the sole regulator of the talking" (p. 72). This study was designed to give participants an opportunity to "have their say," but, as the researcher, I encountered instances in which I struggled to elevate students' voices in the midst of the messy realities of research. I questioned, like Wyngaard (2005) whether my study could qualify as transformative or empowering for children if I formulated the questions and played the chief role in both the authorship and interpretation of the research. In the end, despite the difficulties of this work, I believe this study was beneficial for my participants as well as for myself. My hope is that this research will serve as a tool to improve the future educational outcomes for children like the young people I interviewed.

In the sections that follow, I address this study's implications for teachers' professional practice, programs of teacher and future research, but first I return to a question I was asked as I discussed my dissertation proposal: why does student voice matter?

How Student Voice Matters

Simply put, student voice research *matters* because it is at once political, practical, and respectful work. In the first case, student voice research is inherently political, because as Butt and Raymond (1987) asserted, "in a political sense, ... voice attests to the *right* of speaking and being represented" (p. 76). Thiessen, (2006) in a more recent piece stated that studies under the student voice banner listen not just for students' perspectives, but also for instances in which students get to speak on what adults and agencies do on their behalf (p. 353). Researchers who deliberately engage in student voice work do so because they want to affect change for participants, certainly, but ultimately for the field of education.

Student voice research is also practical work. Capporimo (2001) speaks about the absurdity of designing complex, elaborate studies in order to determine what students are thinking, when we could, as researchers, simply *ask* the students themselves. If teachers wish to improve their practice, or at least learn how their instruction is experienced by students, they too, can ask the children in their classrooms. Cook-Sather (2006a) proposes that doing so often results in academic gains for students:

Thinking about how teachers could better serve them pushes students to identify and articulate their learning needs....Talking about good teaching inspires students to become better students; their analyses of how teaching could be more effective illuminate as well how the students have already improved and can further improve their own approaches to learning. (p. 353)

It is clear that improvements in the educational outcomes for “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995) will not happen without considering how those children experience all aspects of schooling. Traditional views of young people as incapable and immature exclude them from opportunities to contribute to changes that will impact them. Such views are fall short because they fail to acknowledge children’s intellectual capacities and their ability to reflect on issues that affect them (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, p. 1). In the end, I believe student voice research matters because as Cook-Sather (Cook-Sather, 2006b) asserted, it acknowledges and pushes for students’ rights as participants not just in schools, but in the world beyond school.

Finally, student voice research is fundamentally respectful work. When a group of 15,000 students were asked to describe the kind of school they most wanted, “respectful” was one of the top responses (Birkett, 2001). Participation in student voice studies help young people feel respected as individuals in school and in society. MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers (2003) highlight the respectful nature of student voice work. They argue:

Being consulted can help pupils feel that they are respected as individuals and as a body within the school. It can encourage them to feel that they belong, and that they are being treated in an adult way. Pupils who are at risk of disengaging may come back on board if they think that they matter to the school. Schools where pupils are consulted are likely to be places which have built a strong sense of inclusive membership, where differences among pupils are accepted, and where opportunities for dialogue and support are made available to those who find learning a struggle. (p. 1)

It is clear from the above quote that student voice research provides children with a sense of their own worth and importance. In order for respect to be felt on the part of children, however, it must first be given. Cook-Sather (2006b) asserts that respect is a reciprocal dynamic, one that is not decreed in a top-down fashion, but built between individuals and actively sustained through relationships (p. 375).

I have attempted in this section to explain as simply and as succinctly as possible why I believe student voice matters. I argue it matters because those who advocate for student voice realize its political, practical and respectful nature. There is always the potential that student voice efforts will reinforce power relations (Orner, 1992), patronize children (Pollard, et al., 1997), or limit their participation to commenting solely on “comfort issues” such as bathrooms, food and school uniforms (Lodge, 2005), of course, but by and large such concerns can be adequately addressed. Researchers who use care in their student voice studies may help to improve the educational experiences of children

(Roaf, 2002; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). It is the desire to improve education for children that student voice serves as part of the framework for this study. In the sections that follow, I provide the implications of this study for teachers' practice, teacher education and future research.

Implications for Teachers' Professional Practice

As a former teacher, I am keenly aware of the unique and persistent challenges faced by educators. Lack of resources, low pay, difficult working conditions, and ever increasing scrutiny make teaching too often a thankless, and even disheartening career. Certainly, statistics show that a drastic number of teachers quit teaching following their first year on the job, and after just five years roughly between forty and fifty percent of new teachers make the decision to leave the profession for good (Ingersoll, 2003). I hope that this dissertation will serve to encourage teachers who dedicate themselves to improving their practice, as they reflect on and critique their efforts to meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs. While many of my participants had unfavorable things to say about their teachers, it was abundantly clear during interviews that students wanted good teachers, and they cited teachers' instruction, use of incentives and praise, ability to make personal connections with students, and the degree to which teachers yelled (or didn't) as evidence for which teachers they felt were "good" or not.

For example, my participants were generally interested in sharing what they felt teachers did or could do that would enhance teacher-student relationships. They spoke

about the importance of teachers' use of positive feedback, incentives and rewards. Indeed, from my perspective, participants were perhaps *too* attached to such efforts. Certainly, increased scrutiny on schools (manifested by such things as the publication of test scores in local newspapers or decisions to link teacher pay to students' performance on those tests) puts pressure on teachers. This pressure may push some teachers to rely too heavily (or even entirely) on incentives, food, and other external rewards to motivate students, because they feel there is little time to engage with them on a deeper level. The pressures of time may lead some teachers to believe that there is less time to listen to their students, and this decision comes at a high price for students because external rewards may reinforce students' adoptions of performance goal orientations (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

In any case, an overreliance on incentives is a poor substitute for the personal relationships with teachers that students crave. For all my participants' excitement about having received treats, toys, or candies, they spoke just as warmly and enthusiastically (if not more so) about the teachers who students' believed connected with them on a personal level. The students I interviewed enjoyed teachers' efforts to bring something of their personal lives into the classroom. Stories presented in Chapter Six highlighted the kinds of actions and interactions teachers used that students perceived helped foster positive relationships.

Based on the stories my participants shared, particularly those presented in chapters 4 and 6, it would appear that pressure to document student learning may have

prevented some teachers from investing the time needed to develop meaningful relationships with their students. According to Wilson and Corbett (2001), students need skilled teachers who are able to break down complex material so that students can more readily understand concepts, and simultaneously push students toward academic success. The researchers noted students wanted teachers who made connecting them a priority. Wilson and Corbett concluded, “establishing a connection with students’ lives went beyond using relevant content. It also meant taking an interest in students’ daily lives” (p. 87). Although teachers must contend with challenging demands on their time, my participants’ transcripts demonstrate that making personal connections (in addition to pedagogic connections) with students is important.

Schultz (2003) provides a simple but powerful suggestion for how to begin connecting with students in this manner. She argues that the complex nature of schools drives many to embrace standardization, treating student “problems” through one-size-fits-all “solutions.” Schultz advocates teachers resist such mandates by employing a specialized form of listening.

In listening to know particular children, teachers are able to listen for the voices of individual students and how to teach other students in the class. A focus on particulars gives a teacher insight into the whole, beginning with a deep understanding of individuals. A focus on the humanity of students foregrounds students’ voices and their particularized contributions. (p. 171)

As teachers learn to listen in the manner Schultz describes, they equip themselves with the tools how to confront complex classrooms, learning how and when to respond to students individually or collectively across multiple dimensions. This kind of listening also “includes paying attention to all that the students bring to the classroom from their outside lives” (p. 171). Students at all academic levels undoubtedly benefit from this approach to teaching.

Research indicates the importance of teachers’ care for students and ultimately, for society (Noddings, 1992). As individual teachers set aside time to listen to their students, they begin to create classroom climates that are inquiring of and responsive to the full spectrum of students’ needs. Certainly, random acts of listening to culturally and linguistically diverse students’ perspectives, or opinions will not improve the educational outcomes for children overnight. Listening to know children is a vital step toward that goal, however. As teachers take time to listen to students objectively and routinely, their professional practice will improve even as relationships with students are enhanced.

Implications for Teacher Education

Although none of the students I interviewed ever asked about the preparation of their teachers, in many ways their stories bring to the forefront the ways teacher education programs can better prepare their graduates for success in the classroom. In order to present the implications of this study for programs of teacher education, it is necessary to first address some of the on-going debates about these programs.

Discussions over the degree to which teacher education has a lasting positive influence on teacher effectiveness (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000a, 2000b; Michael, 2003), have gone on for decades, even in an atmosphere in which some argue more evidence is needed in order to draw reasonable conclusions (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wycoff, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) suggest that “the research base concerning teacher preparation is relatively thin” (p. i). Certainly, one factor contributing to the thin research base is the expensive nature of investigations that would produce the kinds of complex “chain[s] of evidence” (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 303) required. As Cochran-Smith (2005) asserts, it is no easy task to demonstrate empirically how teacher education positively influences graduates’ learning, and how those graduates’ professional practice is influenced as well as the degrees to which graduates’ practice impacts students’ learning.

Some researchers have questioned whether teachers’ success (typically measured in student achievement data) is more attributable to their subject matter competency and academic skills rather than pedagogical content knowledge (Aloe & Becker, 2009; Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Michael, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Stotsky (2006) suggests teacher education be reformed in a radical manner. She envisions a complete transfer in accountability from education faculty to academic faculty be made for the preparation of preservice teachers for grades 5 and above. She recommends that discipline specific faculty supervise these candidates’ student teaching internships and argues that “the fewer” pedagogical courses candidates take, “the better” (p. 267).

Stotsky's argument dovetails with criticisms of teacher education as institutions that "lack intellectual rigor and focus instead on pedagogical pedantry" (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2006, p. 199).

Programs of teacher education have also been argued to be relatively unsuccessful in supplanting the lessons many preservice teachers learned in their childhood classroom observations (Poynor, 2001; Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996). According to research, many preservice teachers succumb to an apprenticeship of observation, in which they revert to teaching as they themselves were taught rather than making use of the theories and models for teaching and learning addressed in their teacher education programs (Britzman, 1991; Lortie, 1975). Johnson (1994), by way of brief example, studied four preservice teachers and recorded many of the struggles they experienced as they tried (unsuccessfully) to divorce themselves from the teacher-centered models of instruction they relied on in favor of the student-centered models in which they professed belief.

Despite the challenges presented above, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Vasquez Heilig, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995), among others, insist that programs of teacher education do make a difference, and that pedagogical content knowledge is paramount to teacher effectiveness. Studies have, in fact, shown that teacher education and rigorous standards for certification positively affect student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000c; Fetler, 1999; Goe, 2002; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; S. Wilson, et al., 2001). Increasing the amount of clinical practice student teachers complete and working

to eliminate fragmentation between content and methods coursework are improvements more programs are adopting and these improvements address some of the critiques of traditional teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2000a). As Zeichner (2006) observes, any improvement in programs of teacher education are more or less mediated by the working conditions teachers face in schools, and the overall quality of the professional development provided. Zeichner's point is valid, but the reality is that teacher education programs have more autonomy to enact changes that individual schools often do not have.

The young people I spoke to didn't directly address preparation of teachers, however, interview transcripts suggest a number of implications. First and foremost, children want teachers who know them as individuals as well as students. In her descriptions of exemplary teachers of African American children, Ladson-Billings (1994) argued successful teachers, "know their students well. They know which ones respond to a subtle prodding and which ones need a more forceful approach. For them, good teaching starts with building good relationships" (p. 125). The children I interviewed were clear on the behaviors of teachers they found disappointing, as well as the kinds of interactions with teachers that made learning easier, or at least less frustrating. Over and over again, participants' transcripts highlighted the importance of personal connections. As other researchers have found, students perceive that their learning is enhanced when partnered with teachers who make connecting with students a priority (B. Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Intrator (2006) cautions that:

Fostering constructive relationships with students is too critical a factor in being a successful teacher to leave to mere serendipity. Beginning teachers can learn to create one-on-one time with students; learn about and practice different approaches to listening, such as active listening; develop coherent plans for classroom and management grounded in clear expectations and fairness; learn about the developmental patterns of the age group they are teaching; educate themselves about the context, neighborhood, and culture important to students; and reach out to families to expand their knowledge of their students. Each of these elements is critical to developing a constructive bond with students. Again the connection to students is an end to itself and an asset in learning what attracts and sustains the interest of their students. (p. 237)

Intrator's implications couldn't be clearer: teachers who understand teaching as a practice of listening to and connecting with students uncover the varied interests that can be exploited during lessons to help students connect with content. More than that, these teachers grasp that every child, by virtue of being a student in their classroom, deserves individual attention. Rather than leaving the formation of these relationships to chance, teacher education should ensure their candidates grasp the importance of the kinds of connections Intrator, (like the participants in this study) value.

Zeichner (2006) recalls a situation during a meeting in which a high-ranking member of the US Department of Education stated teacher education should simply prepare teachers who were "good enough" to raise students test scores. Zeichner argued

the official's admonition reflected a "view of teachers as low level technicians...without exercising their judgment and making adaptations to the specific needs of their pupils" (p. 333). Calls for "good enough" teachers mirror calls for more evidence-, or scientifically-based research (EBR and SBR respectively) in education. The link between the two is straightforward. Technical, mechanistic views of teaching place teacher education in the position of ensuring, "teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to implement only those instructional practices and curricular benefits for their effectiveness" (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2007, p. 103). The call for SBR is of concern to many researchers, as I explain below.

Scientifically based research is intended to help consumers of research identify "what works" in education as opposed to research is merely "prescientific" or "interesting" but not serious intellectual work, and, more importantly, not research that produces reliable, unbiased results (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 259). The What Works Clearinghouse (www.whatworks.edu.gov) is funded by the US government to serve as a repository of research studies, and syntheses of studies that meet the requirements for SBR: randomized experimental designs and some quasi-experimental designs employing specific kinds of procedures (Dirkx, 2006; Liston, et al., 2007). Such designs are considered to be the "gold standard" for educational research because they are argued to be objective, systematic and rigorous (Dirkx, 2006). Studies that meet the standards for inclusion in the WWC (and the programs and methods that were the subject of investigation) are presumed to be more reliable and trustworthy. St. Pierre (2006),

however, cites scholarship challenging the idea that the science that undergirds such designs is objective and unbiased. She maintains that, “the idea that science is neutral, even transcendent—above the level of human activity, above politics and power—was long ago debunked” (p. 258). Kuhn (1970), for example, stressed that observation is “theory laden” and impacted by the particular paradigms scientists bring with them to the research process.

Although some stress the importance of genres of research in addition to SBR (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Dirkx, 2006), the rhetoric undergirding calls for SBR in education equates SBR with truth, and scholars caution against the chilling effect the push for SBR is having on an already underfunded educational research community (Liston, et al., 2007; Zeichner, 2005).

Teacher education programs must ensure their candidates acquire rigorous subject matter knowledge. Programs must also be designed to equip teacher candidates with the critical reflection and inquiry skills, dispositions, and pedagogical methods that will help them meet the complex needs of our nation’s children. One strategy for meeting this latter goal may rest in the ability of teacher educators’ commitment to helping candidates see the challenges inherent in teaching, by avoiding the trap of presenting only “remarkable” teaching exemplars (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010) and providing candidates with examples that embrace the messiness of instruction, and indeed, inherent to being a teacher (Dudley-Marling, 1997). However, even if teacher education effectively addressed all these issues, and simultaneously “proved” their success by

through “value-added” performance measures (Liston, et al., 2007, p. 103), there will still be challenges that teacher education, scientifically-based research, and the What Works Clearinghouse will easily address. As Shealey (2006) explains, “unless the myriad of issues related to teaching and learning in urban [and other] schools are addressed from a student centered and sociocultural perspective, positive student outcomes will address only surface issues such as test scores and school grading which are merely symptoms of the problem of underachievement rather than causes...”(p. 6)

Limitations

Prior to addressing the implications of this study for future research I feel it is important to attend to the limitations of this research. I am left asking myself questions about the degree to which factors such as my research location, and the makeup of my sample, affected my study. I wonder, for instance, if participants told me so many stories about friendship and bullying because they were interviewed in a context where their peers were everywhere, and opportunities to interact with peers were plentiful. I didn’t find gender to play a significant impact on the kinds of stories students told, but more than half of my participants were female, and while I completed a total of 15 individual interviews with boys, all 26 of the remaining interviews were conversations with girls. I was able to recruit a small group of girls to participate in a focus group, and one other focus group had one male participant, but despite repeated attempts, the “just us guys”

focus group that Baller, in particular, had hoped for, never materialized. These factors may have influenced my study, and they are, I suppose, limitations.

Of course, I must also acknowledge that the experiences, perspectives and opinions presented in this study belong to particular children, attending particular schools, being interviewed in a particular way, at a particular time in their lives. Obviously, in any study reporting findings from a relatively small group of participants, it is necessary to exercise caution when interpreting findings. I recognize that it is doubtful that the findings presented in this dissertation are universally generalizable. However, I maintain that it is equally doubtful that these findings do not, at least partially, reflect the kinds of experiences other students in similar circumstances, schools, and possessing similar demographic characteristics have had or are currently having. In the final section of this chapter I address the implications of this study for future research.

Future Research

Howard (2003) stated that, “researchers [ought] to give greater credence to the ways in which young people see schools and the factors within them” (p. 14). My participants impressed me with their ability to both articulate and comment on their school experiences and I hope this study addresses, in some small way at least, Howard’s call for researchers to give greater weight to young people’s perceptions about school.

When I began recruiting participants, I felt it was essential to interview students who attended different schools so that my findings wouldn’t be skewed, so to speak, as a

result of talking to children at just one or two schools. After letters of assent and consent were secured, I realized my participants went to different *types* of schools as well. In general, school type did not seem to dramatically affect students' view of schools, although there was one notable exception. Rhino's experience as a student bussed to a suburban school was fundamentally different than those of other students who were also bussed. Rhino felt some of her school's teachers and students were "racist," and this negatively affected her overall opinion about her school. Future research might place school type (charter, public, rural, urban and/or private) as the central subject of interest in order to address questions such as: What role does school type play on students' perception of their schooling experiences? How do different school types impact students' perspectives on their schools and teachers?

Due to the necessity of completing my research in a timely fashion, I was unable to interview my students over a longer period of time. Although I attempted to interview students at the end of one school year and the beginning of a new one, so that students would have at least the beginning of one additional school year to refer to during interviews, six of my participants had to be dropped during fall interviews because they either no longer were members of TLC, or because as sixth graders participants were in middle school, and thus outside the scope of this study. Future research might be done to determine how students' school experiences are affected as they transition between elementary and middle school. Research is also needed that follows students throughout

their elementary school career so that potential patterns of experiences can more readily be determined.

Although I did not formally interview parents, future research might investigate the degrees to which parents' perceptions of their children's schools mirror or differ from their children's perceptions. Are parents aware of the kinds of experiences their sons and daughters are having in their elementary school years, and if not, how can children be encouraged to share with their families the kinds of stories they so readily shared with me?

Conclusion

In their review of research on students' experiences of curriculum, Erickson and Shultz (1992) lamented,

virtually no research has been done that places students at the center of attention.... if the student is visible at all in a research study she is usually viewed from the perspective of the adult educator's interests and ways of seeing, that is as failing, succeeding, motivated, mastering, unmotivated, responding or having a misconception. Rarely is the perspective of the student herself explored. (pp. 467-468)

Although an effort is underway to eliminate the problem Erickson and Shultz (1992) identified, there is still much work to be done. I believe this study is warranted in part because the very " 'childish' principles" (B. Wilson & Corbett, 2001, p. 310) and

“challenging observations” (Ballenger, 2007, p. 100) that children are in the unique position of supplying hold much promise for informing the work of teachers, teacher educators, and society at large. The stories that students share, when given the opportunity, broaden and enrich what adult researchers understand about the complex sphere that children occupy as untapped experts-the world of school.

Epilogue: (A Research Story)

Midway through one of my final interviews with Rihanna looked up from drawing and stated, “I think you’re very creative.” Her comment surprised me in part, because from my perspective, I’d done nothing in my research efforts that demonstrated creativity. I asked questions, interacted with participants, and helped with homework when I could. Days later, as I listened to our interview again, I was struck again by her use of the word creative. Why had I been so surprised by her remark? I realized I equated Rihanna’s use of the word “creative” with artistic, forgetting that creativity is just as essential in solving complex problems. The educational experiences of children like the young people I interviewed are not likely to be improved without creative problem solving approaches. Nieto (1994) argued, “educational transformation cannot take place without the inclusion of the voices of students, among others, in the dialogue” (p. 396). The challenges facing our educational system are significant, but as Nieto reminds us, adults should not attempt to contend with these challenges independently. I hope more research will be published that affirms what children know about schools and schooling.

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

BOSTON COLLEGE
Department of Teacher Education/Special Education,
Curriculum and Instruction

“What ‘Other People’s Children’ Had to Say:
Culturally Diverse Students’ Storied School Experiences”

Researcher: Krista Lucas
Research Supervisor: Dr. Curt Dudley-Marling

Parent/Guardian Permission for Minor Child’s
Participation in a Research Study

What is the Research?

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Krista Lucas, under the supervision of Dr. Curt Dudley-Marling. Krista is a Ph.D. candidate and this study is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirements of her degree at Boston College.

Your child has been selected as a potential participant for this study because she or he goes to a public elementary school, is in grades 2-5, and attends a community based afterschool program. In addition, your child has attended school in the United States beginning in kindergarten, and is from a diverse cultural or ethnic background. *Please read this form carefully before deciding whether you want to allow your child to participate in this study.*

Purpose of Study:

- The problem this study will address is the lack of “student knowledge” in understandings about how to prepare teachers for success in culturally diverse classrooms.
- This study will focus on the experiences of a small group of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students, and will provide each child with the opportunity to talk about their school experiences.
- The data (information) taken from this study may have important implications for the fields of educational research, teacher preparation, and curriculum development.

Description of Study Procedures:

- Small group conversations and individual interviews will provide important information in the form of personal stories. This information will have implications for teacher preparation, and curriculum development.
- The study will consist of two to three individual interviews and one focus group, or small group interview. Each individual interview is expected to last between 35 to 45 minutes. Some interviews may be longer or shorter, depending on the student's interest in talking. At any time, you or your child may stop an interview without penalty. Interviews will be conducted at the afterschool program site your child currently attends. In all, the total number of participants will not exceed twenty-five (25) children.
- A focus group is a small group conversation centered on a specific topic of interest to the researcher and participants. In this focus group, the topic of interest is students' schooling experiences, however, it is possible that some students will share information and ideas that center on other topics.
- The focus group interview is expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes. The actual length of the focus group may be longer or shorter, depending on the student's interest in talking. At any time, your child may stop participation in the focus group without penalty. The focus group will be conducted at the afterschool program site your child currently attends. In all, the total number of participants in the focus group will not exceed six children. In the event more children want to participate in the focus group than there is room, either an additional focus group will be scheduled or the researcher will choose a specific date and time that will accommodate the majority of interested participants.

Risks:

- No serious risk of harm is anticipated for participants who decide to take part in this study. However, some children may experience feelings of sadness or anger in recalling a school event or memory that is unpleasant or unsettling in some way.
- At the beginning of the focus group and again at the conclusion of the focus group, all participants will be reminded that the details of the conversation (names, incidents, reactions, etc) are to be kept private and are not to be discussed. You should be aware, that there is a risk of some children choosing to ignore this direction.
- As in any research study, there may be unknown risks associated with participation.

Cost:

- There is no fee for participating in this study.

Benefits:

- It is hoped that being invited to talk about their schooling experiences will be an enjoyable opportunity for participants. Being asked to participate in a research study can be an exciting process for children.
- The knowledge gained from this study may be of benefit to the educational research community.

Privacy:

- Your child's privacy is a chief concern for this study. Your child's personal records, including name, age, school name, city of residence and/or other identifying information will be stored in a locked file cabinet throughout the duration of this study.
- In any publication of results from this study, including doctoral dissertation and any other future publications (articles, books, etc.) no identifying information will be published.
- Any electronic information will be coded and secured using password-protected files.
- Any audiotape recordings will also be kept secure in either a locked file box or a password-protected file. Following the completion of the study and the awarding of the Ph.D. degree, all audiotapes will be completely destroyed by crushing the cassette tapes and disposing of them in the trash.
- Following the completion of the study and the awarding of the Ph.D. degree the master copy of participants' actual names, identifying information and their pseudonyms will be destroyed by shredding the document.
- Transcripts of interview conversations and focus group will be filed and kept indefinitely, however, no identifying information will be recorded on the actual transcripts.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

- Participation in this study is completely *voluntary*. You do not need to give permission if you do not want your child to take part in this study. If you do choose to give your permission, you may pull your child from participating in the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.
- Withdrawal from the study will *not* affect your child's attendance at the afterschool program. There is no penalty for withdrawal from this study.

Dismissal/Exclusion From the Study:

- It is possible that your child could be dismissed from participation in this study if she or he requests to quit, or is unable or unwilling to talk about their schooling experiences.

- Since children from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are desired for this study, it is possible that your child might be excluded from the study if a sufficient number of children from a particular group have volunteered.
- Since the perspectives of both boys and girls are desired, it is possible that your child might be excluded from the study if a sufficient number of children from a particular gender have volunteered.
- Since this study will consist of children at different grade levels, it is possible that your child might be excluded from the study if a sufficient number of children from a particular grade have volunteered.
- If your child is unable to attend the focus group at the set date and time, your child may be excluded from the focus group.
- Since children from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are desired for this study, it is possible that your child might be excluded from the study if a sufficient number of children from a particular group have volunteered.
- Since the perspectives of both boys and girls are desired, it is possible that your child might be excluded from the study if a sufficient number of children from a particular gender have volunteered.
- Since this study will consist of children at different grade levels, it is possible that your child might be excluded from the study if a sufficient number of children from a particular grade have volunteered.

Payments:

- At the conclusion of the study, each child will receive a small token of appreciation for her or his participation in the study in the form of gift certificate for a children's book or a gift certificate for a movie ticket.
- At the conclusion of the focus group, each participant will receive a small token of appreciation participation in the focus in the form of a gift bag containing two pencils, a bookmark, stickers and an eraser.
- No other payments will be given to participants, or members of their family.

Questions:

- If you have questions prior to, or at any time during, this study you may contact Krista Lucas by phone at: (781) 454-5981, or via email at: lucaskr@bc.edu.
- If you have any questions about your rights and/or your child's rights as a research participant, or if you wish to report a breach of confidentiality, injury, or other serious concern, you may contact Dr. Stephen Erickson, Interim Director of the Office of Human Research Participant Protection at Boston College by calling: (617) 552-2345 or via e-mail at: ericksst@bc.edu

Copy of this Consent Form:

☐ By checking this box, I am confirming that a copy of this consent form has been (or will be) given to me for my records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

☐ By checking this box, I am confirming that I have read the contents of this form and I have been encouraged to ask questions.

Signatures/Dates:

Please write your child's name and your name below and then check yes or no. If you give your permission for your child to participate in this study, please sign your name.

Study Participant (Please print your child's name):

Parent/Guardian (Please print your name):

☐ **Yes, I give my permission to allow my child (named above) to participate in this research study.**

☐ **No, I do not give my permission to allow my child (named above) to participate in this research study.**

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN
DATE

Thank you for your attention to this letter!

Appendix B: Letter of Assent

BOSTON COLLEGE
Department of Teacher Education/Special Education,
Curriculum and Instruction

“What ‘Other People’s Children’ Had to Say:
Culturally Diverse Students’ Storied School Experiences”

Researcher: Krista Lucas
Research Supervisor: Dr. Curt Dudley-Marling

Minor Child’s Assent for Participation in a Research Study

What is this study about?

- This is a project that Krista Lucas is doing with students in grades 2-5. Krista wants to learn more about what school is like for kids in these grades.

What do I have to do now?

- Before saying, “Yes,” please read this paper or listen to Krista read it aloud to you.
- Please ask any questions that you have at any time.

What am I being asked to help?

- You have been asked because you are in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade and you go to a public school.
- You are a member of a culturally or ethnically diverse group.
- You have gone to school in the United States beginning in Kindergarten.
- Your parent or caregiver has said you can take part in this study.

If I say, “Yes,” what will I have to do?

- Meet with Krista to talk at least twice by yourself and possibly once with a small group of kids.
- Answer questions about what school is like for you.
- Draw at least one picture.
- Listen to what Krista and other kids have to say.
- Agree to let Krista tape record and take notes on what you say.
- During the project if you get confused, or if you don’t understand something that Krista asks you to do, you can ask her questions or tell her “I don’t know,” or “I want to stop.”

What are the risks?

- A “risk” is something harmful, something that could hurt or upset you.
- It isn’t likely that there will be any risks for helping out with this study.
- You should know that some kids, including you, might not like the feelings they have when they talk about something that happened at school that upset them.
- During the small group talk, Krista will remind everyone to keep what is said private, but some kids may tell other people what you or someone else says. Krista can’t control that.

Cost:

- There is no cost for helping with this study

What are the benefits?

- A “benefit” is something good, something that could make you feel happy.
- There probably aren’t any benefits for helping out with this study, but your ideas will be of interest to a lot of adults who will read about what you have said.
- Some kids may like being able to talk about what school is like for them with an adult.

How will the things I say be kept private?

- Krista won’t tell any of your teachers or other adults what you say, unless what you say is about someone who has already hurt you or another child, or may hurt you or another child in the future. If you share something like that, Krista will tell you that she will need to talk to another adult for help.
- In anything Krista writes about this project, your real name will not show up.
- The paperwork and other materials from this study will be kept private.
- Project materials (like tape recordings) will be kept in locked file cabinets while the study is happening.
- Project materials will be destroyed after the study is over.

What if I change my mind? (Can I say, “Yes” and then say, “No”?)

- You can help with this project if you want to.
- You do not have to help with this project if you do not want to.
- If you say you want to help and then decide to stop helping, you can do that.
- You will still be able to go to the afterschool program if you don’t want to help.

Will I be asked to leave the study?

- If you are not able to talk about school with Krista, or with other kids, or if you are not able to follow the directions you are given the best way you know how, you may be asked to leave the study.
- If there are more kids who want to be part of the focus group than there is room, you may not get to take part in the focus group.

Payment:

- At the end of the study you will get your choice of a gift certificate for a book or a gift certificate for a movie ticket.
- At the end of the focus group, each person will get one a “goody bag” with two pencils, a bookmark, stickers and an eraser inside.
- No other payment will be given to you, your parents, your caregivers, or your family members.

What do I do if I have questions?

- If you, your parents, or your caregivers have any questions about this study, you can call Krista at (781) 454-5981, or contact her by email at lucaskr@bc.edu.
- If you have questions about your rights as a person helping with a research study, you may call Stephen Erickson, Interim Director of the Office of Human Research Participant Protection at Boston College by calling: (617) 552-2345 or you may email the Director at: ericksst@bc.edu.

Will I get to keep a copy of this paper?

☐ By putting a checkmark inside this box, I am saying that I have been (or I will be) given a copy of these papers to keep at home.

Statement of Understanding:

☐ **By putting a checkmark inside this box, I am saying:**

Yes! I have read and understood all these papers, or these papers have been read out loud and explained to me and I understand them.

☐ **By putting a checkmark inside this box, I am saying:**

Yes! I have been invited to ask questions.

Signatures/Dates:

Please write your name and today's date on the line and then check yes or no.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Statement of Assent:

- ☐ By putting a checkmark inside this box, I am saying:
Yes! I want to help with this research study. I understand I can change my mind later and quit and I won't get into trouble.
- ☐ By putting a checkmark inside this box, I am saying:
No. I do *not* want to help with the study.

Thank you for reading this letter!

Appendix C: Recruitment Brochure



My Ph.D. Project

Krista Lucas
Doctoral Candidate

Boston College
Lynch School of
Education



What is the time commitment?

Each interview is expected to last between 35 to 45 minutes. It is possible that on certain days, conversations may take slightly more or less time.

Each student will be interviewed at least two times. Some students will also participate in a small focus group interview.

You or your child may stop participation at any time for any reason.

Questions? Please Contact:
Krista Lucas
Phone: (781) 454-5981
E-Mail: lucaskr@bc.edu



How will privacy be protected?

Identifying information will never be revealed. All records will be kept under lock and key.

No identifying information, like a participant's real name, school name, or street address will ever be revealed in any written material published as a result of this study.

All tape recordings, research notes, transcripts, and other research records will be kept in a locked file box while in transit, and in separate locked file drawers while in storage.

Any computer records related to this research will be stored in password-protected files.

Boston College IRB
Approved

MAR 10 2009

Thru: Mar 9 2010

Q & A

What is your background?

I am a former third and first grade teacher. I worked in Los Angeles, CA for five years before moving to the Boston area to begin my Ph.D. program.

Why are you interested in interviewing my child?

I taught in an urban public school in which all of my students were members of different minority groups. My teaching experiences, combined with my interest in culturally responsive pedagogy, have inspired me to pursue working with culturally diverse students during my dissertation research.

Why not interview kids at their schools?

Since so much of the school day revolves around assessment, I feel it is important to talk to the children in a comfortable environment where they will not fear their interview answers will be "graded".

Will the results be shared?

Once the study is completed, participants and their families will be invited to a meeting where results will be shared. Copies of my dissertation will also be available.

About My Ph.D. Project

What can adults learn from children? I have chosen to interview culturally diverse elementary school students, because I believe children in general, have not been thought of as experts within the research community. As a former classroom teacher, I am interested in students' views and opinions about all aspects of their schooling experiences.

I believe this study will provide evidence that elementary school children have a remarkable sense of what is happening (both good and bad) within their schools. By interviewing a small group of children I will be able to learn more about what school is like from a child's viewpoint.

Although many educational experts have theorized about teaching in urban areas, or teaching students from diverse backgrounds, few studies have put young students at the center of the inquiry process, and fewer still have made an effort to talk to children outside the school context.

Participants in this research project will have a unique opportunity to share their insights and ideas about school with a wider audience. The results of this study may hold implications for the preparation of teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Appendix D: Interview Protocols

(Some questions adapted from protocols developed by Wilson and Corbett, (2001), pp. 135-140) **Note: These questions will be drawn on as needed during the focus group conversation. Every question will *not* be asked of every participant and questions may be asked in an interview not appearing on this protocol.**

Individual Interviews:

Participants' Background:

- Before we begin, what questions do you have about what we're going to be doing?
- Name, age, grade level, school name, city, teacher's name?
- How many brothers/sisters do you have? Names? Grade levels? Schools?
- Do you, your siblings, or your parents speak any languages besides English? If so, which languages?

School Specific Questions:

- When did you start going to school at _____? (i.e. At what grade did you begin at this school? Pre-K, K, etc)
- What do you like best about your school? Why? What don't you like about your school? Why?
- Who do you think is most important in your school? Why? Who do you think is least important in your school? Why?
- Tell me about what usually happens each day at your school. What is your favorite part about a regular day? Why? What is your least favorite part about a regular day? Why?
- Tell me about a special day you have had at school. What happened on that day? What did you like best about that day? Was there anything about that day you didn't like? If so, tell me about that.
- Do you feel you are a part of your school? Do you feel welcome here? Why or why not? Tell me about a time you felt welcome/unwelcome at your school.
- Tell me about recess at your school. How many recess periods do you get? Who do you like to play with? Why? What do you do during recess? Why? What do you like best about recess? Why? What do you like least about recess? Why? What is something you think teachers should know about recess? Why?
- Talk to me about lunchtime at your school. Where do you sit at lunch? Who do you sit with? Why? Do you bring lunch from home or do you eat at school? What do you like/dislike about school lunches? What do you like/dislike about bringing lunch from home? What usually happens when kids are eating lunch at your school? Why? Can you think of a really special or strange lunchtime that took place at your school? What happened? What do you like best about lunch? Least? Do you eat breakfast at school? Tell me about that. How is breakfast at school

different from lunch at school? Why?

- How often do you get to go to the library at your school? PE? Art? Music? Computers? Do you have different teachers for these classes or is it your regular teacher? What do you like best about these special classes? Why? What do you like least about special classes? Why?

Adult-Student Relationship Questions:

- Tell me about a time when a teacher did something you really liked. What happened?
- Tell me about a time when a teacher did something that you didn't like. What happened?
- What do your teachers do that make you feel special, important, good (etc.)?
- Are there any other teachers who work with you? How often? Why do you work with these teachers? What do they help you with? Do they work with you in your classroom or do you go to another classroom?
- Do you like your teachers? Why or why not? If you could ask your teacher something, what would you want to know? Why? What would you want your teacher to know about you? Why?
- Have you ever said hello to your school's principal? Tell me about that time you spoke to her/him? Have you ever been sent to the principal's office? Tell me about that. What happened before you were sent? During the visit? After you went back to class? Do you like your principal? Why or why not? If you could ask your principal something, what would you want to know? Why? What would you want your principal to know about you? Why?

Final Question (for all interviews):

- What else would you like to say about being a student/being in school?

Study Specific Questions:

- Which kind of interview did you like best: group or one-on-one? Why?
- What else would you like to know about my project?
- What can I do next time that will make talking with me easier or more fun for you?
- What questions would you like me to answer for you?

Focus Group Interview Questions:

Note: These questions will be drawn on as needed during the focus group conversation. Every question will *not* be asked of every participant and questions may be asked in an interview not appearing on this protocol.

Ice Breaker Questions:

- Name your favorite color, favorite food, and the one thing you can't live without.
- Describe the pair of sneakers that you would design if you were given a contract by your favorite shoe company.
- American Idol: Love it? Hate it? Want to be on it?

School Specifics Questions:

- What don't grown-ups understand about being in school? What keeps them from understanding?
- What things can teachers do to help kids who are stuck figuring something out? What things are helpful to you that teachers do when you're stuck on something?
- Lots of kids have talked to me about "morning work." Why do you think kids are given "morning work." How does "morning work" help kids learn?
- Talk about bullying, teasing and/or fighting with friends at school. What have you seen happen? What do grown-ups need to do about teasing at school?
- What do teachers do that upsets kids?
- Are most of your friends (or kids you know) getting as good of an education as you? How do you know?
- What is your biggest school fear and why?
- Tell about the times your teachers read books out loud to you. How often does this happen? What do you like best about read alouds? Is there anything you don't like about read alouds?
- What is the hardest thing about being a kid in school and why?
- What do teachers need to know about homework? What do kids need in order to do their homework?
- Tell us something you would like to say to a teacher that you're afraid to say.

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